THE HEALTH OF HIGGINS LAKE

PROTECTING OUR WATERS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

COMMITTEE REFLECTIONS

OCTOBER 2026

EXPLORING EVERY IMPACT **EMPOWERING EVERY VOICE**

ENSURING A HEALTHIER HIGGINS LAKE



COMMUNICATIONS

- Collaboration continues on the Higgins Lake Watershed Information Map. The September's Ripple Effect, "Connect the Dots," displayed two watershed maps side by side: properties with information on file with the Central Michigan District Health Department, and properties with none.
- HOHL has 475 active email addresses, with a 60–65% open rate.
- Facebook, Instagram and website updates continue, using materials from the geofencing effort.
- HOHL participated in association outreach and Jim Ostling spoke at Roscommon Rotary September 17.
- Increasing community engagement remains a priority. Public apathy about lake concerns is the biggest challenge.

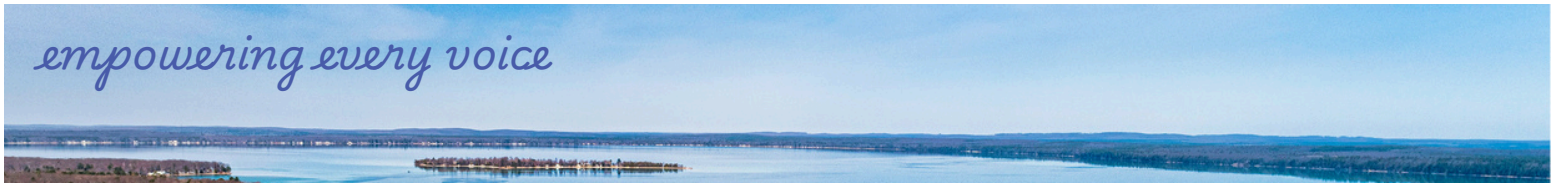


STEERING

- Fertilizer work is moving under the Science Committee.
- John Barta presented the Higgins Lake Exploration Initiative, sponsored by Higgins Lake Property Owners Assoc. and the Higgins Lake Foundation. It pairs a dive project with PONAR lake-bottom sampling to establish quantitative baseline data on what lies on and beneath the surface
- Huron Pines will present November 17; watershed management planning continues.

INFO/TECHNOLOGY

- Public and research versions of the Higgins Lake Watershed Information Map were released with continued refinement of usability, reviewer access, legends, help, and scientific provenance. The two versions are managed separately because of privacy considerations.
- Added data included: Gerrish Township zoning, parcel-level terrain, watershed elevations, terrain, topographic contours, and hydrology to help explain water movement in the watershed.
- A proposed EGLE-funded server was developed to provide the technology needed for future research.
- HOHL's searchable collection of lake studies is moving from Nextcloud to Zotero Online.



SEPTIC & GROUND WATER

- The Gerrish Township Planning Commission continues to review the draft septic ordinance. HOHL continues to encourage an ordinance that completes the septic-system inventory first before implementing standards.
- An EGLE grant was awarded and will support township staffing, a server, GPS and other equipment.
- The Higgins Lake Foundation-funded Sovereign Park Demonstration Map is moving forward following approval of a professional services agreement October 13th. This map is the first of several intended to gather detailed information on groundwater and on-site well and septic systems around the lake. The testing will focus on three areas: E.coli, phosphorus, and human-associated microbial sources.
- The public parcel-density map shows development around the lake was released.
- Property Lake & Land Management (PLM) proposed a small pilot study on the use of lanthanum in septic tanks to reduce phosphorus.



Health of Higgins Lake

HOHL continues exploring lake-health issues through research, collaboration and public outreach.

SCIENCE

- Science reports are progressing, including a comprehensive aquatic invasive species draft. Three or four other subcommittee reports are expected by the end of the calendar year. Reports will be updated as new data emerges.
- Non-Nutrient Contaminants: Research is complete on PFAS, pharmaceuticals, metals, microplastics, microcystins related to algal blooms, and chlorides. Still to gather: forest fire smoke, watercraft exhaust, petroleum by-products, and bilge flushing.
- Nearshore: The E. coli report is nearly complete; dissenting opinions will be attached. Swimmer's itch has been assigned to this committee. Water chemistry and biological conditions remain a substantial body of work, and topics still ahead include sediment change over time, marl deposition, macroinvertebrates, aquatic plants, phytoplankton and zooplankton, lake-level fluctuation, microplastics, and harmful algal blooms.
- Deep Water: More than 20 years of dissolved oxygen data and lake-bottom dive findings are under review.
- Changing Fisheries: Draft sections will examine food webs, plant life, historical fish populations, stocking and human impacts. A full draft is estimated at about six months out.
- Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS): A seventy-page draft report was distributed to subcommittee members for review.
- Recreation: Work continues on lake-access-site data collection, QR codes for boater education, CD3 boat cleaning units, reporting violation, fireworks, and swimmer's itch coordination with HLSIO.