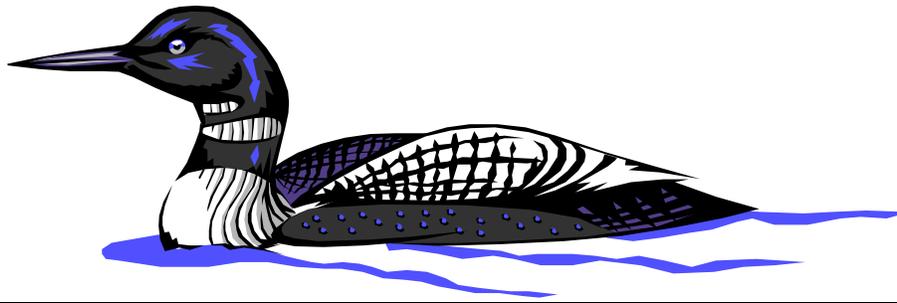


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# Skegemog Wildlife Area Stewardship Committee

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## 2015 Newsletter

Well, it has been an interesting winter indeed in and around the Skegemog Wildlife Area, with record cold weather for much of February. Above freezing temperatures in March came as a very welcome relief for all of us who brave the winters of Northern Michigan. Spring can't be too far away and we'll soon be thinking about what needs to be done to keep the pathways open for the public

I must start with an apology to our loyal readers for not getting our annual newsletter out to everyone in 2014. I do appreciate all of those who came out for our annual meeting and especially those who participated in our work days in both 2013 and 2014.

### **In Memoriam**

Before I talk about the swamp, I need to share the deep sense of loss we feel over the passing of Abby Gartland after a courageous, nine-year battle with cancer. She was a very special lady who loved nature and being out in the woods. She was well known for her vast knowledge of plants and animals, and she served the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy

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## April 2015

for many years. Mostly, she was a beautiful, loving person who moved everyone she came in contact with. She visited the Skegemog Wildlife area many times and was our invasive species specialist. We loved her and will miss her. She was one of a kind.

### **What's been happening**

Looking back over the last couple of years we have had a number of important accomplishments. Thanks to the efforts of our DNR representative Katie Armstrong, the two old derelict buildings near the three ponds area were removed and replaced with a few hundred seedling pine trees. What an improvement that is!! Also with Katie's help we replaced two of our aging old signs with new, more permanent metal signs at the North Shore Pathway and the Torch River Pathway. Thank you for your help Katie.

Over the years we received multiple reports of trees that had fallen and blocked the pathways. Each year we remove a few dozen fallen trees and branches to keep the pathways open. Last fall we rented a brush-

hog to widen the pathways just enough for bicyclists and cross country skiers to enjoy the pathways without constantly hitting overgrowth and tree branches.

Also in 2014, a storm knocked a tree down along the side of the boardwalk through the swamp, ripping out a 14 ft. section of the boardwalk.



**Before**

Our volunteer crew responded in a couple of days and rebuilt the boardwalk – good as new. Great work guys. Thank you.



**After**

### **Beaver Business**

Yep, they're back. It seems that the beavers have returned to once again raise the water level near the end of the boardwalk enough to put a few inches of water over the boards. Our amphibious assault team will evaluate the situation in the early summer to determine what new measures may be needed to control the water level. It may just be that our beaver deceiver needs a tune-up.

### **Invasives report**

Watching for and eliminating invasive plant species from our watershed is going to be an ongoing battle. It is an incurable situation. In the wildlife area we have seen what we believe is invasive, narrow leaf cattail in the open part of the swamp where

it meets the open lake area. This year we will need to do sampling and analysis. If it tests positive, a treatment plan needs to be considered. Russian Olive is becoming more common in upland areas. We have been using a tractor to pull it out of the ground with some success. In the chain of lakes we are seeing more instances of Eurasian milfoil which is a big concern. Aggressive countermeasures are being used when it is spotted in Torch and Elk Lakes and the Torch River. Treatment is expensive and labor intensive. Tim Wheeler discovered a patch of purple loosestrife near the swamp that we will need to watch this year. One encouraging note is that, so far we have not observed any invasive phragmites in the swamp.

I encourage you to go to the Michigan.gov website to learn more about the characteristics of these invasives and when you spot a suspicious plant, please bring it to our attention.

### **Rapid City Road Turnoff Parking Area**

Anyone who has used the Rapid City Road parking lot is aware that it is in serious need of repair. We had hoped to end the 2014 season with a repaired and re-graded parking lot. The gravel was delivered, but winter set in too quickly for us to get it re-graded. As soon as the ground thaws and the ground dries out a bit, we hope to finish the job.

### **Loon Report**



Lake Skegemog has been “host” over the past few years to loon pairs and single loons looking for nesting sites. Three years ago a chick was reared at the south end of the lake and was banded for future study. Last year we were visited by a loon expert from Michigan Common Coast, a loon research organization. Based on his study around our lake he has confirmed three zones that are suitable for loon nesting: the Torch River entrance to Lake Skegemog, the south end of the lake and the north end at Wabigama point. We will be setting an artificial loon nest at the north end of the lake at “ice off” again this year and hope we get a nesting pair to take up residence. We also hope to set a buoy at this nest site to warn boaters to avoid the area in May and June if we have a nesting pair. If you would like to volunteer to help with the loons on our lakes or have other questions please visit the web site [www.commonloon.org](http://www.commonloon.org)

### **About the Skegemog Wildlife Area**

As I ramble on about the wonderful things that are happening in the Skegemog Wildlife Area, I sometimes lose sight of the fact that many of the people who receive our newsletter have not had the pleasure of

visiting and spending much time there. Some might not even be quite sure where it is exactly. So here is a brief overview of what's there. Please refer to the map on page five.

The area covers 3,300 acres which is owned by the State of Michigan and protected from future development under the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy. The area extends from the mouth of the Torch River in Antrim County, all the way down the east shore of Lake Skegemog to the south shore where it abuts Hoiles Dr. in Kalkaska County. On the south, it is bounded roughly along highway M-72 running between Barker Creek Nursery and Hill Rd. On the east, it extends nearly to the Rapid City Rd.

The area is mostly heavily wooded and probably 60% covered by swampland. The swamp is fed by hundreds of springs that flow into creeks and streams which are heading toward Lake Skegemog. An abandoned railroad line which used to run between Traverse City and Alden now provides a four mile pathway through the middle of the area. Additional pathways extend beyond the main rail bed. Probably the best known pathway is the boardwalk, which goes through the swamp to an elevated viewing platform. Another route is the North Shore Pathway which goes from a parking area at the intersection of Schneider Rd. and Round Lake Rd. out to the shore of Lake Skegemog. For people

who like a shorter walk there is a pathway from Torch River Rd. to a wheelchair accessible platform on the Torch River. To the north of the North Shore pathway, there are additional paths through the woods which are great for hiking or cross country skiing. Whatever path you choose, you are sure to see beautiful woods and wildlife.

## **Our History**

Over a century ago the Skegemog Wildlife Area was mostly a wilderness traversed by a rail line. The rail line was built right through the swamp when construction equipment was still pretty crude. Amazingly, it has endured in great shape over all these years. There was an old logging town there in the lumbering years and a few foundations remain today.

In the 1980's a group of local citizens led by Harry and June Janis set about the task of acquiring privately owned holdings and transferring them to state ownership, while protecting them from future development so that they can be enjoyed by the public for generations to come.

As you enjoy the boardwalk pathway, take a moment to imagine the challenges faced by the volunteers who built it by hand, thirty years ago. They built all of that while standing knee-deep in swamp mud. What an amazing accomplishment.



## What's ahead for 2015?

It seems that there is never a shortage of projects for our small, but ever growing taskforce of volunteers. Here are a few of the projects being considered which will be discussed in greater detail at our annual spring meeting on May 4th, 2015.

1. **Spring cleanup** of winter tree-fall and branches which obstruct the pathways. That will be on **Saturday, May 23rd, starting at 9 a.m. at the Rapid City Rd. turnoff.** We expect to be done by noon.
2. We also plan to clear more small trees and brush that are starting to encroach on the southern portion of the main pathway.
3. We intend to prepare accurate GPS maps of the pathways and we will continue to improve markings for trails
4. Spraying for poison ivy near the sides of the pathway.

5. Our end-of-season annual picnic. The date and details are to be announced.

The Monday, May 4, 2015, spring meeting of the Skegemog Wildlife Stewardship committee will be held again at the Hausers' house at 9240 Skegemog Point Rd. at 7:00 p.m. All are welcome. We hope that you can join us for our meeting and one or more of our activities. If you can come, please rsvp, so we have enough seating. If you have any questions or issues we can discuss, please contact me at (231) 620-5750 or [dave@davehauser.net](mailto:dave@davehauser.net). You can also contact Dale Claudepierre at (248) 644-7614 or [ginidale70@gmail.com](mailto:ginidale70@gmail.com) . Or you can see us online at [www.elk-skegemog.org](http://www.elk-skegemog.org).

Sincerely,  
Dave Hauser & Dale Claudepierre

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Dave Hauser  
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Skegemog Wildlife Area Stewardship Committee