

President's Message



Mary Beth Kazanski

ESLA President

Well, another summer has flown by despite our lockdowns and physical distancing. Getting out into nature whether by boat, hiking trail, or chair in the shade has hopefully allowed you all to bond with friends and family and to refresh yourself a bit during this stressful year.

Though some of our activities were curtailed this summer, ESLA volunteers have been busy. Among our efforts we have been treating aquatic invasive species such as invasive Eurasian Milfoil and purple loosestrife, monitoring water quality, participating in collaborative research and maintaining structures for boating safety. And though we have greatly

missed our monthly educational seminars, "It's A Shore Thing", we are attempting to keep you all aware of issues in our community as well as presenting programs via alternative formats. Hopefully by press time there will be an informative video available to you about the fishery in our area. (If not, check our website for a link and further information.)

The ESLA Board has also recently put forth statements to the township regarding the new Whitewater Township Park. The plans for the park include a boat wash station but we have suggested the inclusion of a second such station due to the expected increase in usage once the park is completed. We are also carefully watching developments of the Milton Township proposed RV Park. There are growing concerns that this park may cause significant risk to the nearby Torch River from sediment and septic waste. We encourage all riparians in these areas to let their elected leaders know their views.

Our new contact email address is ready for your use should you need to submit questions or concerns. Ra-

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ther than having to search for Board members' emails, you can simply submit to elkskegemo-glakes@gmail.com. We hope to make it much more convenient for you to communicate with us as well as better protect the private email listings of our Board from internet hackers. We will still provide phone numbers and addresses of our Board should that form of communication be better for you. These will be available on the last page of the newsletter you receive in the mail.

As this pandemic hopefully comes to an end with the end of 2020 (Oh! What a year this will have been!), the Board greatly appreciates your patience and understanding. We are looking

President's Message (Continued from pg. 1)

forward to the day when we can meet physically instead of virtually, gather not only for an interesting lecture but also a handshake and cup of coffee, and fully enjoy the offerings of our region. Please stay with us during these difficult times and on toward the future. And as always, we welcome new and lax members to help us encourage the maintenance, restoration and protection of our beautiful waterway.

The Perfect Shoreline Buffer

By Dean Ginther

By now, most ESLA members know that having a shoreline vegetative buffer provides a barrier to absorb nutrient and sediment runoff, helps to prevent erosion, makes it more difficult for geese and ducks to come ashore and fertilize your lakeside property, provides privacy and looks appealing, and provides habitat for pollinators, small critters and even fish.

And guess what -- I have the perfect shoreline buffer along my lakefront property. And I am going to share my secret for such a wonderful shoreline buffer with you.

You might think that I have the perfect shoreline buffer because I hired the very best and most expensive landscape architect to design my shoreline buffer with native and adapted plants and shrubs? Or maybe you think it is because I contracted with the most environmentally well regarded local landscaping crew to install my professionally designed shoreline buffer? Or perhaps you have surmised that it is because I have hired a certified master gardener to attend to my flowers, weeds, and shrubs weekly? Or maybe you have guessed that it is because I spend several hours every week pulling weeds, dead-heading flowers, trimming plants, and watering?

If you guessed any one or any combination of the above you would be wrong. Which is not to say that if you have done any of the above, that's not a good thing. But that is purposely not what I have done. Now for the secret.

Well actually, before I convey this amazing secret, I want to provide a bit of background. About 20 years ago Sharon and I returned to our second full time residence in Michigan after my first retirement from a career in higher education. One reason we returned was to live in and rehabilitate the house that my great Uncle and Aunt (Web and May Shippey) constructed and lived in since 1932. Most of their extensive lakeside property remained undeveloped and natural but there was about 100 feet adjacent to the house which was turf and was regularly mowed and weed wacked right up to the water's edge. My Aunt May was a wonderful gardener (she founded the Rapid City Garden Club) but I don't know that she was aware of the importance of a shoreline buffer. I continued their practice of mowing and weed wacking to near the water's edge for a few years before I became more enlightened – actually about the time I became ESLA President in 2005.

When I became more aware of the importance of shoreline buffers and damage which nutrient runoff creates in lakes, I pondered how to best develop a shoreline buffer along our property. Although I was a certified Master Gardener (I have since forgot most of what I learned) I was reluctant to do anything that would require a large expense or demand consistent attention and mainte-

nance. And then one day a large acorn fell on my head and I had an epiphany. I realized that I could have a totally natural shoreline buffer without any additional expense or significant time for maintenance if (and here comes the secret) ...

If I was willing to just stop mowing and weed-eating along the lakeside waterfront. Yes, that's it – I set aside an area about 10 – 15 feet from the lakefront and no longer mowed and weed wacked there. Within a few years there was a totally natural and cost and maintenance free buffer. Well, the buffer is almost maintenance free since I will admit that I actually do spend about 30 minutes some summers trimming bushes and trees.

In the spring and early summer there are flowers which have naturalized themselves (the ubiquitous orange day lilies and some others) and yes, there are weeds, some of which flower too. Eventually, some woody plants emerged, which I occasionally trim back. And about 15 years ago a small hemlock tree began growing in the buffer – its large parent was about 50 feet to the south. I would look at it as it grew taller every year and I would ask myself if I wanted a large hemlock in front of our house blocking the view. I almost cut it down on several occasions but now I am glad that I didn't. It has become a lovely, straight tree (upper right of picture second tree to the left) which is now about 30 feet tall. As it has grown, I have trimmed up some of the lower branches so we have both a view and privacy and, most importantly, it has become a major shoreline stabilizer.

And that's the secret to a cost free and largely maintenance free shoreline buffer. You might be thinking that it is not the most beautiful shoreline buffer you have ever seen and I wouldn't argue that point but it does the job and works well for us.





BASS TOURNAMENTS AND HOW THEY WORK

By Ken Krentz

Fishing tournaments have become popular throughout the country, state, and our local lakes, especially for bass. Some are highly competitive with substantial prizes while others are mostly just for the fun of fishing and camaraderie. Several bass tournaments are held on Elk and Skegemog Lakes throughout the summer. Here is generally how they work.

A sponsor or club simply organizes a time, date, and location with participants, and registers the tournament with the DNR online at:

<http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/fishingtournaments>.

There is no permit or approval required. The DNR monitors the registration website to assure there is no overlap or time conflicts for a particular location and they will resolve as required. Commonly, organizations will register at the beginning of the season for the entire year. Also, the sponsor is required to provide a follow-up report with number of participants, fish catch data, etc. Go to the above website at any time to get the schedule for our lakes.

Bass season for catch-and-release is year around, catch-and-keep is currently the Saturday before Memorial Day through the end of the calendar year. A tournament can only be scheduled during the catch-and-keep season. Obviously, all the current DNR fishing rules and regulations apply.

Here's how it works. A starting site is chosen, usually a DNR boat launch site. That also becomes the weigh-in site at the end of the tournament. A duration is specified, such as 6-9 PM for instance. No fishing can start before the start time and you must be back at the weigh-in location before the end time. All fish caught must be kept alive in an oxygenated live well onboard. That is why tournaments can only be held during catch-and-keep seasons; because you are temporarily keeping live fish until after the tournament is done. Fish are weighed and/or measured for length at the weigh-in site, and scoring is based on these measures. Then they are immediately released alive back to the lake. Tournament fishing is strictly catch-and-release; you will be disqualified if you bring in a dead fish or one dies during the weigh-in process.

Bass are native to Elk and Skegemog Lakes, and the DNR doesn't plant or actively manage them since the habitat, reproduction, and populations remain fairly stable. This is typical throughout the state. For more discussion on this topic and many other fish related topics please go to the ELSA website at elk-skegemog.org. There you will find a Zoom videoconference recorded August 4 with our local DNR Biologist, Heather Hettinger, and 4 ELSA board members. It is a question and answer session of over an hour in length about Elk and Skegemog Lakes, and the Rapid River covering bass, trout, Atlantic salmon, whitefish, fish planting, fish shelters, and more.

Good luck and have fun fishing!

PATROLLING the CHAIN OF LAKES

By Pat Pierce



Keeping order on our chain of lakes is a daunting task with Elk Lake, Torch Lake, and Lake Skegemog totaling nearly fifty square miles plus the Elk and Torch Rivers. This area is composed of three counties Antrim, Grand Traverse and Kalkaska. The Sheriff marine divisions of these three sometimes share the duty for this given area but Antrim county contains about ninety per cent of these waters plus the entire remaining upper chain from Clam river on except for Six Mile Lake.

With five boat slips from the Elk Rapids Marina to Intermediate Lake the Antrim County Sheriff Marine Division undertakes this task with considerable zeal. This allows them to respond to emergencies quicker and if that is not enough they have recently

trained Elk Rapids Fire personnel in the use of Antrim's Elk Rapids boat and equipment for an even quicker response in that area.

When I asked Antrim Marine Patrol Deputy Joe Clark some questions about common violations on these waters he was quick to point out that the marine division regards it's first duties as search and rescue, educating the public and then law enforcement. That said, he then related that children six years or younger boating when wearing nonapproved life jacket is an offense that is very likely to be cited. He also cautioned that the puffy-arm toy like wraps seen so often on children do not meet the legal standard set as US Coast Guard approved style 1 or 2 life preservers.

Officer Clark also related that fourteen or fifteen year old's driving personal watercraft (PWC's) must be accompanied by adults within one hundred feet of them at all times and are required to be carrying their boating safety certificates. Those boaters and PWC operators sixteen years old and born after December 31, 1978 are also required to carry their certificates. Towing, including water skiing, without an active observer, staying at least one hundred feet from shoreline or placed items like rafts and mooring buoys are two additional common offenses as well as boats creating wakes in no wake zones.

Deputy Clark also teaches Antrim County Sherriff Marine Patrol's annual boating safety classes where boating safety certificates are issued upon class completion. These classes are held one time each at Mancelona, Bellaire, Elk Rapids and Central Lake High Schools at various times in April and May for twelve year old's and above (adults can attend also and often do). These classes are free as opposed to taking and paying for them online. I have helped out at these classes and witnessed the great communication Officer Clark has with younger people. With twenty five years of teaching biology at Mancelona High School as well as five years as principal Deputy Clark is patient and thorough. No one fails. With a Masters Cum Laude in biology he currently teaches biology, anatomy and physiology at the collegiate level at Northwestern Michigan College.

Give a big hello if you see him out there.

Are You a Paid-Up Member?

By Bob Cambell, ESLA VP

Where have all the 2019 members of the Elk-Skegemog Lakes Association gone?

A special committee of the ESLA board has tried this summer has tried to answer, address and — hopefully — help remedy that question.

In 2019, ESLA had 561 dues-paying members. As of the mid-August deadline for this newsletter, we had 330 for 2020 — or about 59% of the 2019 total. Dues represent almost all the revenue we use to pay for what the organization does for those who live or have second homes on Elk and Skegemog lakes and the Elk, Torch and Rapid rivers.

For more context, consider that ESLA membership peaked in 1998 with 765 riparians. In 2025 ESLA will celebrate its 75th anniversary and we hope to break the old record. Until then, your volunteer board urges past members who haven't paid this year's dues and those who haven't joined the fold to help us reach last year's standard.

The basic \$25 household membership fee (nearly half of those paying this year contributed up to \$100) is a bargain to support ESLA's commitment to you — as stated on the home page (elk-skegemog.org) — “Preserving and Protecting Our Precious

There are two options to pay 2020 ESLA dues:

- *Go to elk-skegemog.org, click on “Join ESLA, Pay Membership. Use a credit card or PayPal.*
- *Send a check (put 2021 dues in memo area) to **Elk-Skegemog Lakes Assn., PO Box 8, Elk Rapids, MI 49629.***

Resource.”

Some examples of how your dues money is spent: control of invasive aquatic Eurasian milfoil and purple loosestrife; our water specialist intern's salary; purchase, spring placement and fall removal of buoys leading in and out of the Torch River; loon nesting platforms; laboratory testing of water samples collected by our volunteers and intern for Swimmers Itch; maintenance of our website and publication and mailing and printing of this newsletter and two others sent to all riparians.

Also, inspired by the pandemic necessitating cancellation of our annual meeting and “It's a Shore Thing” gatherings, we've added Zoom interviews of people who have important insights into our shared water. (See story on page X of this newsletter.)

If you are new to our waters or a long-time resident who hasn't been an ESLA supporter before, please join the community. To celebrate and congratulate our members, ESLA will publish a newsletter in November listing the names of all 2020 members and their level of support.

If you have paid your 2020 dues, thank you. If you are not sure, contact Brenda Miller (brenda@fiduciaryservicesnorth.com) to check. Thanks.

Saving Rugg Pond

By Mary Beth Kasanski, ESLA President



Rugg Pond is a lovely spot and it just got a little lovelier thanks to anonymous donors.

The issues with Rugg Pond are a bit complex. Originally built over 100 years ago to provide electricity to the nearby area, Rugg Pond was eventually sold to Kalkaska County in 1953. It is no longer producing that energy but has become a local treasure. Inspections of the dam over the years have graded it as “condemned” due to its old-fashioned earthen structure. However, it

might be possible to improve its condition with additional earthen support. The pond has also served as a catch basin for silt and sediment coming from above. After many years, the pond is getting dangerously full, threatening to pour that sediment into the beautiful Rapid River below it. Could this sediment ultimately be used to repair the dam itself? Removal of the sediment by dredging and using it to rebuild the dam is a possibility only if the sediment itself is safe.

ESLA, thanks to the efforts of Board member Dave Lawicki, has long had its eyes on Rugg Pond and Rapid River. These are beautiful waterways in our area and the sedimentation that cannot be trapped by the dam is putting them at risk. The need to dredge the pond is clear but there is concern over possible contaminants that would create a larger problem if improperly disturbed. Sampling the sediment is the necessary first step to not only repair the Rugg Pond dam but to help in reducing sediment that is clogging Rapid River and thus threatening its biology.

Mark Randolph of the Kalkaska Conservation District (KCD), has been working tirelessly on finding funding for this project. Anonymous donors have stepped forward to pay for the two-day study which was done by Great Lakes Environmental Center in July. Multiple sites were sampled. Results will help the KCD determine the next step.



Though this will not be a quick fix, the path ahead will be a little clearer. Know that ESLA with the KCD will continue to act as advocates for this precious waterway.

Sampling Update for E. coli

By Samantha Kraus (with the assistance of Andy Hogarth)

Every summer we hear the term “E. Coli” used frequently in regards to our Northern Michigan beaches and waterways, and this also applies to our very own Elk and Skegemog Lakes. Over the years, ESLA has done significant testing along various sections of the lakes, all with the intention to keep our lakes safe and beautiful. We sample for E. Coli because high concentrations can be an indication of failing septic systems, or other unacceptable sources of pathogens.

Escherichia coli, or E. Coli, are a diverse group of bacteria that are found in the intestines of warm-blooded organisms, such as humans and animals. Most species of these bacteria are harmless, and many are necessary for digestion in our intestinal tracts. However, there are a few strains that can cause serious illness. E. Coli are a subset of the fecal coliform group of bacteria and we can get sick by unintentionally ingesting some of them. They are invisible to the naked eye, making it impossible to know if they have found their way into our drinking water or lakes and streams.

Since these bacteria come from fecal matter, they can enter our waterways in a variety of ways. Decaying dead animals, agricultural farms,

birds, or pets may all contribute E. Coli to the water either directly or indirectly through storm water runoff. Unfortunately, there is not much we can do about wildlife, but it is also important to note that typically the levels of E. Coli that wildlife contribute are not of concern. The biggest concerns are stormwater runoff and failing septic systems, because they can release harmful levels of E. Coli directly to our waterways either through the groundwater or by overland runoff.

The health impacts that humans can face from ingesting these bacteria vary from person to person, but can range from severe stomach cramps, diarrhea or vomiting, to more extreme cases, where it could be life threatening. Symptoms can appear in as short as one day after the ingestion, or up to ten days post exposure.

The state of Michigan has established public health water quality standards for the levels of these bacteria that are considered safe for total body contact recreation (swimming). These standards consist of both a daily maximum criterion and a monthly average criterion. The daily geometric mean must not exceed 300 colonies of the E. Coli bacteria per 100mL of

water, and the monthly average must not exceed 130 colonies per 100mL¹. If the levels exceed these amounts at public swimming beaches, it may trigger beach closure by the local health department.

Michigan is the only state in the nation that does not have a statewide sanitary code requiring periodic inspection of septic systems. This leaves a lot of reliance on homeowners to make sure their systems are in working order and to local units of government to encourage proper septic system maintenance. It is recommended by public health officials that septic systems be checked and fully serviced every three to five years in order to assure everything is working properly. Milton Township has a point of sale ordinance that requires septic systems to be inspected when the property is being sold, but such ordinances are not common. Since we all live in such a beautiful place, many lake front properties are kept in the family for generations, which means that the septic systems are not required to be checked at all within that time frame.

In 2019, ESLA sampled 8 different locations around the lakes for E. Coli. These locations varied from small creeks that discharge into the lakes, to long sections along the

Dick Crout

shoreline. We have been working with local units of government, aiding in the decision-making process regarding sewer extensions, as well as the state government. The results ranged from 0 colonies per 100mL to >2419 colonies per 100mL over the hundreds of samples taken.

Failing septic systems may also contribute unwanted nutrients like phosphorous and nitrogen to the lake water. Phosphorus and nitrogen can stimulate weed and algal growth, leading to lake eutrophication. Dense growths of a green filamentous algae called Cladophora along the lakeshore may indicate a nutrient source migrating into the lake.

We hope that this information reminds you to help us ensure the health of the lakes and our loved ones, and take care of your own on-site septic system!

The following URL is to the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, which provides detailed information on septic systems and other links to informational and helpful videos.

<https://www.watershedcouncil.org/septic-systems.html>

A long time member and supporter of ESLA, Dr. J. Richard ("Dick") Crout passed away on July 9, 2020. Among many other achievements, he was instrumental in establishing the "Friends of Milton Township" and, with the help of the local land conservancy, he and his family supported the preservation of more than a mile of shoreline and over 1000 acres of farmland and forest in the Torch River-Lake Skegemog area of Michigan.

His daughter, Linda Crout Spevacek, has carried on his conservation efforts and has recently helped to establish the Torch Elk Skegemog Alliance (TESA). The mission of TESA is to:

- Promote Responsible Growth in the Three Lakes Watershed.

Protect the Environment Surrounding These Lakes and its Tributaries.

Call Attention to Activities that Potentially Threaten the Health of the Watershed Environment.

TESA is opposed to the construction of the proposed RV park near the Torch River Marina and has raised over \$10,000 so far to pay for legal representation to present the organizations concerns at the upcoming Sept. 15 Milton Twp. Planning Commission Meeting at 7 p.m. at the Township Offices.

To stay informed regarding TESA and their efforts, contact Brenda Hasso <tesaorg2020@yahoo.com> to get added to the information list. Questions can be directed to: Tim Smith 319-239-0464 or John Spevacek 860-614-7945

FYI—Nov. 3 Michigan Ballot

Use of State and Local Park Funds Amendment

The Michigan Use of State and Local Park Funds Amendment will appear on the upcoming November 3, 2020 election ballot as a legislatively referred constitutional amendment.

A "yes" vote on the amendment changes how revenue in the state park-related funds can be spent, including (a) making projects to renovate recreational facilities eligible for grants and (b) allowing the parks endowment fund to be spent on park operations and maintenance, and (c) removing the cap on the size of the natural resources trust fund.

A "no" vote on the amendment opposes making changes to how revenue in the state's park-related funds can be spent, thus (a) continuing to prohibit projects to renovate recreational facilities from receiving grants and (b) continuing to prohibit the parks endowment fund from being spent on park operations and maintenance, and (c) keeping the cap on the size of the natural resources trust fund.

What would the measure do?

The ballot measure would make changes to how revenue in the state's park-related funds can be spent. As of 2018, the funds received revenue from mineral, oil, and gas leases and royalties. The ballot measure would affect the following funds:^[1]

- The **Natural Resources Trust Fund (NRTF)** provides grants to local governments for acquiring land for recreational use, environmental conservation, and scenic importance and for developing recreational facilities. The ballot measure would make projects to renovate and redevelop existing recreational facilities eligible for grants. The ballot measure would require that a minimum of 25 percent of grant funding be spent on developing, renovating, and redeveloping recreational facilities each year. As of 2018, a maximum of 25 percent of grant funding could be spent on developing facilities. The ballot measure would continue to provide that a minimum of 25 percent of grant funding be spent on acquiring land each year.
- The **State Parks Endowment Fund (SPEF)** provides funding for the state park system. As of 2018, the fund could be spent on the acquisition of land and capital improvements. The ballot measure would allow the fund to be spent on park operations and maintenance. The ballot measure would require that at least 20 percent of the annual expenditures be spent on capital improvements.

The ballot measure would also remove the NRTF's cap of \$500 million in principal and allow the trust fund to begin receiving revenue again after the SPEF reaches \$800 million in principal. The NRTF reached the cap in 2011. Removal of the cap would allow the NRTF to grow faster and increase funding for grants.

See [https://ballotpedia.org/Michigan_Use_of_State_and_Local_Park_Funds_Amendment_\(2020\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Michigan_Use_of_State_and_Local_Park_Funds_Amendment_(2020)) for additional background.

ELK-SKEGEMOG LAKES ASSOCIATION BOARD MEMBERS

September 2020

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