

ELK-SKEGEMOG LAKES ASSOCIATION OCTOBER 2021 NEWSLETTER

President's Message



Bob Campbell
ESLA President

*“Trust the Earth well.
It was not given to you by your
parents,
it was loaned to you by your
children.”*

That quotation is on the business card that Antrim County soil erosion officer Heidi Shaffer handed me at ESLA’s August “It’s a Shore Thing” event, appropriately about healthy lakeshores. Heidi’s card attributes the words to a Native American proverb.

Google shows there are several versions citing authorship to people from various lands. I choose to think the words reflect a universal wisdom across continents and cultures.

Simply put: We have the privilege to spend a few years or decades on our shores. Keep it well for those who follow.

Many of us have recently sliced off our own pieces of paradise. Others have longer personal connections, inheriting cottages and cabins dating generations back. My wife, Ruth, and I bought our

dream two+ acres on the quiet side of Skegemog Point in March 2011.

In 2013, we tore down the tiny 1940s cottage that was there and built a house with lake-facing windows galore. We told our builder to avoid cutting trees to make way for the home. We loved the tall, broad-branched white pines, maples and oaks, and the serenity of being nestled in the woods. Knowledge that their roots slurp up rainfall before it can wash sediment or fertilizer into the lakes would follow.

We would soon learn that the peninsula dividing ESLA’s namesake lakes was once a seasonal destination for Native Americans who came to fish and hunt. My eagle-eyed son-in-law still occasionally

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spots spearheads in the shallows.

Over time, we embraced the proverb’s message of our responsibility to future generations, whether our children or someone else’s. We planted a greenbelt of deep-rooted native plants along the shoreline. The outcome wasn’t perfect. Strong, sustained spring winds washed away some of the new plants and soil. So we corrected.

In the eight years since becoming year-round residents, and especially the past two, the signs we see of change are worrisome.

Consider:

1. The golden-brown algae we didn’t know of a dozen years ago has continued to proliferate, at times tainting the color of our blue waters.
2. We recently learned —

though not a surprise to the region's top fish biologist — that round gobies, a small, invasive (eastern Europe origin), prolific breeding fish that feasts on gamefish eggs are present in our lakes and potentially changing the food chain.

3. We've had two consecutive years of reduced early summer mayfly hatches. The bugs may be annoying on windows, screens and siding, but a strong population is a sign of good health in waters where fish gobble them up. More study is needed.

3. Monster rainfalls — ones supposed to occur every 50, 100 or more years — are happening multiple times a year, flooding basements and crawl spaces of homes that had never been wet. In one storm in August, more than 5 inches was recorded on some rain gauges. As the waters flowed downhill, small streams and ones where there had been none before carried large amounts of black sediment to our waters. Accompanying high winds uprooted hundreds of mature trees.

4. Like it or not, development of our shorelines — yes, property owners have every right if following local regulations to build their homes — has kept a frantic pace. The pandemic combined with growing reach of fiber optic into our neighborhoods has helped make the dream of living in northern Michigan

and on our exceptional lakes a reality for many. Property and home values seem to know no ceiling.

How does ESLA respond?

I'll repeat this: You have an amazing ESLA board of 18 volunteers doing their best. Consider some of their backgrounds: teacher, professor, doctor, lawyers, top national public health expert, gaggle of engineers, top state environmental regulator, CPA, financial analyst, business owners, and a journalist.

With one exception, we're retired and aged from mid-60s to early 80s and we have families who like to visit like yours do in the warmer months.

The challenges we face require a commitment to education, communication, outreach, science-supported investigation and outcome-based action.

We must enlist dedicated specialists to help meet the challenges we face now. They don't work for free. And we must create an accessible reserve to future issues.

This newsletter is mailed to about 1,300 addresses, because we are committed to informing all of you who live along our shores. Yet, fewer than half who get the newsletter are dues-paying ESLA members. Many have stood gener-

ously behind us. This year, we've had a record number who have paid \$100 or more. For those not with us, tell us what we can do to win your support. Email us at ElkSkegemogLakes@gmail.com

On Sept. 16, the ESLA board agreed to raise recommended dues levels, which have not changed in nearly 20 years, for the 2022 dues year which begins Nov. 1. The recommended levels will be \$50, \$100, \$250 and \$500. **Until then, you have until Oct. 31 to pay 2021 dues at recommended levels of \$25, \$50, \$75, \$100 or more and have your name appear in our "Member Celebration" newsletter later this year.** The ESLA board is developing strategies to support our mission for a challenging future and we expect to report on those in the next newsletter.

We're better together!

To pay 2021 dues by the Oct. 31 deadline, send a check (write 2021 dues in the memo field) to Elk-Skegemog Lakes Assn., Box 8, Elk Rapids, 49620 or go to our website elk-skegemog.org and click on the "pay dues" box to pay dues by credit card or with PayPal.

Summer Lake Biologist

By Samantha Ogle

With summer just passing, you may remember seeing me on the ESLA waters in my kayak, or driving down side roads, or constantly writing in my notebook, and wondered who I was or what I was doing. I have been with ESLA for three summers now and am officially known as the summer lake biologist. In December 2019, I graduated from Western Michigan University with my B.S. in Freshwater Science and Sustainability. Since then, I've been lucky to continue my work with ESLA.

Below are summaries of some issues I have worked on. I have had assistance from volunteers who helped make my work possible. Each project takes field work, data collection, and analysis and documentation on my home computer.

Water Sampling

Water quality monitoring is a large, critical element of my work. Most samples are for E. coli analysis, though I've checked other parameters as well. The sampling is a key way to measure the health of the lakes, track localized trends, and have the potential to catch a small issue before it becomes larger. It provides hard data, which can then lead to further investigation or action.

Shoreline Sampling

Many sections of near-shore waters have been visually examined and sampled. The data helps tell us whether more sampling is needed. Typically, I take samples where I find heavy growth of Cladophora, a green filamentous algae that thrives in water with high nutrient levels. I also take samples from discharge pipes, creeks, or anything that appears unusual. Often, my work comes at the urging of citizens concerned about their observations. I also revisit areas we've previously sampled. Below is an example of an ongoing sampling project.



Foam in Spencer Creek in August 2021

Spencer Creek

Spencer Creek is a small stream that empties into Spencer Bay, on the west side of Elk Lake. Historically, many nearby property owners have raised concerns about water quality in the creek. A riparian whose property abuts the creek and has lived there more than 20 years told me it has, "always been of concern". ESLA has sampled it for E. coli and other parameters over the years and raised our concern with a local business about its possible impact on the creek.

In 2019 when sampling Spencer Bay for E. coli, I immediately noticed discolored water coming into Spencer Creek before it reached Elk Lake. This led to a summer of frequent sampling, discovery of very high E. coli levels, and follow-up by staff from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE — the former DEQ). Burnette

Foods, has a groundwater discharge permit from EGLE which allows it to spray limited volumes of fruit processing wastewater onto fields adjacent to wetlands that Spencer Creek drains.

Interpreting our observations and data has been challenging. Naturally occurring tannins can cause wetland drainage to be discolored, but the discoloration in Spencer Creek does not seem entirely consistent with tannins. High E. coli concentrations can be from non-human sources, which also may pose a human health hazard.

Since our first contact with EGLE in 2019, the agency has formally cited Burnette Foods three times for violating multiple conditions of its discharge permit, including exceeding the company's authorized discharge volumes and unauthorized discharge to surface waters. We will continue monitoring conditions in the creek and track progress of EGLE's enforcement actions.

Invasive Species Control

Fortunately for the health of all waterways, Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) has had great attention from state and local programs in recent years. Aquatic plants typically spread and grow easily, making them a concern when boats and trailers move between waterways. Learning how to stop the AIS spread is relatively easy. Just remember: Clean, Drain, Dry (that is now the state law). I have helped riparians identify aquatic plants and aided in treatment of invasive species like Eurasian Watermilfoil.

Purple Loosestrife

We have worked diligently in recent years with two contractors to treat and eradicate purple loosestrife. We have been very successful! This summer, I dug out plants at 13 locations, and our contractors treated others. A mature plant can produce more than two million seeds and quickly blanket acres of land.

I can identify many other plants and make recommendations to ESLA members on creating or improving a healthy greenbelt between homes and the water. Don't worry, you will still have fabulous views of the water!



Samantha, measuring very large and mature purple loosestrife plants

Sedimentation Control

One project required me to help stabilize the edges of a creek bed with the goal of reducing the black sediment that washes into Elk Lake after heavy rainfall. The several intense storms this year have made the project more difficult, but I will try new options. The goal is to get new plants to take root in the muck at the edges and stabilize the soil as a defense against heavy currents during rains that wash sediment into the lake.

Swimmers' Itch and Bird Surveys

My work with swimmers' itch has changed over the past three summers, as we have had evolving sci-

ence. The results of our investigations led us to focus on strategies to avoid infection, rather than continuing the trapping and removing of native merganser hens and their broods. In 2019 and 2020, we conducted bird surveys on Elk and Skegemog Lakes that gave us critical data about how other waterfowl species and migratory birds utilize our lakes. We completed regular sampling for swimmers' itch, along with DNA source tracking, called qPCR, and collected fecal samples from the various waterfowl. The data made clear that migratory waterfowl, native mallards and geese were all hosts in the life cycles of the swimmers' itch parasites. We concluded we had to stop fighting nature. Instead, our advice now is to protect against the bites that cause infection. We know that avoiding water contact in mornings, in the first few yards near shorelines and when onshore winds are blowing dramatically reduces bites leading to the itchy bumps. ESLA has explained in newsletters and on its website the association's science-backed decision to stop trapping mergansers and focus on the prevention strategies.

ADOPT-A-Stream with The Watershed Center

ESLA is part of The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay's ADOPT-A-Stream program. I have helped with macroinvertebrate sampling and training. Macroinvertebrates are any animal that lacks a backbone, and is able to be seen without a microscope. A few examples are mayflies, dragonflies and scuds. They play critical roles in the health of ecosystems and are a great indicator of water quality. I especially love getting into the Rapid River, sampling for the tiny creatures and identifying them.



*I am grateful for the opportunity to improve, learn, consult, and offer suggestions to help ESLA. With your financial support and membership, I think I have helped ESLA carry out its mission: Preserving and Protecting our Precious Resources. Thank you!
Samantha Ogle*

Quick Takes on Your Lakes



DNR: Star buoys are *verboden*

Don't shoot the messenger: The Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources has contacted ESLA and other northern Michigan lake associations asking us to pass this along — STAR BUOYS are not permitted to be anchored in front of private property. These buoys have a large star and have become popular among waterfront

property owners. If you've anchored one in front of your property, you could be fined and/or face confiscation of the buoy, the DNR says. Many have used the buoys to discourage near-shore boating, especially in swim areas. You may anchor — without a permit — a swim raft or a mooring buoy (smaller than the blue star buoys and having a mooring ring) used for overnight mooring, as long as they don't impede navigation.

Also, be aware that **boaters at no-wake speed are permitted to navigate near shorelines on our waters**. If traveling greater than no-wake speed, boats must be at least 100 feet offshore from your dock or hoist. If you see a violation and obtain the MC number of the offender, the DNR says it will follow up. Contact DNR law enforcement by calling or texting **800-292-7800**, *phone lines are open 24/7*. ESLA may seek approval for signage at public launches in 2022, making boaters aware of their legal responsibilities, including to stay far from loon platforms during nesting and chick-rearing seasons. We may also invite DNR enforcement staff to an "It's a Shore Thing" meeting in spring 2022 to hear your concerns.

After drone flight: What's next?

ESLA'S contractor Dennis Wiand, owner of Zero Gravity Aerial, successfully completed his drone flights over our 42 miles of shoreline in August. He'll sort through what he captured on camera over the coming months as we move to the next step. Kelsey Froelich, a biologist with ESLA's contractor Freshwater Solutions, LLC, will analyze and categorize the data found on the films and make recommendations on next steps to the ESLA board. Stay tuned!

Eurasian watermilfoil success

For the first time in several years, ESLA and its partners didn't have to chemically treat EWM, the invasive aquatic weed that has vexed some northwest Michigan lakes. Board member Dale Claudepierre confirmed there was no EWM in the handful of locations that required treatment in past years. Is it permanently gone? Not likely.

We dig purple loosestrife

Actually, we dug purple loosestrife. Working with our two contractors, ESLA used chemical treatments to eradicate the invasive shoreline plant in most places, but at 13 locations along the east shore of Elk Lake, summer biologist Samantha Ogle dug up and removed the fast-spreading plant.

Quick Takes on Your Lakes

Helpful shoreline booklets available

ESLA's new membership committee leader, Deanna Seifried, has made arrangements to get 200 copies of a 27-page publication created by the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnerships with helpful ideas to improve your shoreline such as creating greenbelts and keeping away geese (and their prodigious poop). Once in hand, we'll distribute copies to zone captains where you'll be able to get your copy. Send an email to elkskegemoglakes@gmail.com if you'd like one. Leave a phone number if you can.

friends. The operators briefly turned off the turbines so those attending could hear inside the normally deafening plant. Federal rules require the dam operators to maintain consistent lake levels and avoid the lows and highs seen on the Great Lakes, a huge benefit for our riparians.

Magazine features Elk Lake lakeshores

The June 2021 issue of Michigan Blue Magazine features ESLA's former president and still board member Bob Kingon, as well as Elk Laker Mary and Jim Lill and Karen Wolfe with a focus on the healthy lakeshores they've achieved on their properties. Writer Jeff Nedwick had help identifying the Lills and Wolfe from ESLA's Deanna Seifried, who is also president of the Elk Rapids Garden Club. Enjoy the article through this link: <https://www.mibluemag.com/sky-sand-surf/shoreline-preservation/>



Shore things were big things again

After a pandemic-forced retreat from ESLA's "It's a Shore Thing" events in 2020 (except for the zoomed interviews we posted on our website elk-skegemog.org), the Friday night gatherings resumed — all outside — this summer.

Heidi Shaffer, Antrim County's soil conservation agent extraordinaire, gave a well-received lesson on what waterfront property owners can do to create or enhance healthy lakeshores in late August.

On Sept. 10, Antrim County Director of Dams and the owners of the Elk Rapids Dam's hydroelectric license did a tell-and-show for about 90 ESLA members and

We Need Your Emails...PLEASE

To communicate quickly and effectively when issues arise (ESLA only publishes three printed newsletters annually and there's lag time and expense involved from start to finish), we need your emails. We promise not to bug you and you can unsubscribe, but we'll let you know quickly about changes with scheduled events, concerns about environmental issues, opportunities to volunteer, and THANK YOUs when you do submit. Send an email to elkskegemoglakes@gmail.com and we'll have your email.

Quick Takes on Your Lakes

Torch Elk Skegemog Alliance Requests Support

The President of the Torch Elk Skegemog Alliance (TESA) and ESLA Board member, John Spevacek, is making an appeal for donations in TESA's continuing legal challenge to a proposed RV Park in Milton Township. Go to the TESA website for more information: tesaorg.org

Online Contributions:

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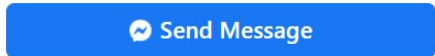


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Elk-Skegemog Lakes Association

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Since kicking off an ESLA Facebook page earlier this year with our social media/website guru and board member Kate Lett, it's humming. We're up to nearly 300 followers. Check it out and join the followers. Click on the Facebook search tab on the top left corner of the page and start typing Elk Skegemog and before you get far you'll see the ESLA logo with the loon. Click on it. You're free to post (we'll monitor for inappropriate content.) or send post material to elkskegemoglakes@gmail.com. Our Aug. 30 post about the "Shore Thing" with Heidi Shaffer (see above) reached at least 1,392 people. That's impressive. The more people who read and contribute to the page, the more viable it becomes for communication.

Elk Skegemog Lakes Association Endowment Fund Receives Largest Donations Ever

By Dean Ginther, Chairperson ESLA Financial Committee

In 1999 the ESLA Board of Directors established the Elk Skegemog Lakes Endowment Fund. The Endowment Fund is a Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation (GTRCF) environmentally themed fund designated to support the mission of the Elk-Skegemog Lakes Association. This year, the ESLA Endowment received several significant donations which resulted in a doubling of the total amount held in the endowment. Donations from three ESLA Board members brought in \$11,000 and a donation of \$60,000 was made by estate of a long time ESLA member and supporter. The total now in the ESLA endowment is \$144,352 and we hope to grow it considerably more in the upcoming years.

The endowment Fund principal is held in perpetuity and grows, depending on GTRCF investment returns and donations. An annual payout of 4% is the guaranteed and is distributed quarterly to ESLA. In the past, for an example, distributions received from the endowment have supported high school and college summer interns conducting on-going research, water monitoring, and invasive species identification and treatment. Giving to the endowment Fund through the GTRCF supports ESLA programs for the preservation and protection of our lakes, rivers, and watershed. All gifts to the endowment are forever gifts, since the principal is never depleted and distributions continue to support ESLA every year.

Contributions to the Elk-Skegemog Lakes fund can be made on-line at: <https://www.gtrcf.org/give/give.html>. From the GTRCF homepage do a search for Elk-Skegemog. The GTRCF can accept gifts of cash, stocks and bonds, and legacy gifts such as a deferred or planned gift, an estate, trust, or a will bequest, as well as other options. GTRCF will work with your financial advisor and can provide a variety of resources to support gift giving considerations and details. Note that the fund selected should be the Elk-Skegemog Lakes endowment. Dean Ginther, ESLA Board member, also is available to answer any questions regarding contributions to the Endowment Fund. Contribution to the Endowment Fund is not a substitute for ESLA annual dues. Please consider including ESLA in you charitable donations.

Golden brown algae “blobs” appear

By Bob Campbell, ESLA President



In late August, several ESLA members and board members noticed ugly, yellow-green blobs in Elk and Skegemog lakes. The phenomenon only lasted a few days.

ESLA collected samples of the goo and took them to Becky Norris, who has led still inconclusive research into the root causes of GBA proliferation for the Three Lakes Association (Torch, Clam and Bellaire). She confirmed that the blobs were primarily GBA as it decomposed. The released gasses floated the masses to the surface. Norris reported the good news: no evidence of the toxic blue green algae.

But she also confirmed widespread observations that GBA levels are increasing since her research began eight years ago, and, in some locations that GBA is attaching in mats to the lake bottom and not free-floating above it.

“I see it as the canary in the coal mine,” Dr. Norris said. “Things are changing for the worse. But we can't say it's because of any one thing.”

Dr. Norris, Bob Reider, a retired aquatic biologist who lives on Elk Lake, and ESLA board member Bob Kingon, a nationally-recognized public health specialist before his retirement, all agreed several issues could be at play:

High water temperatures (surface temperatures into the low 80s in late August) this summer.

The extreme rainfall events of recent years, flushing more sediment and nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen from farm and lawns into streams and lakes — food for the algae.

Increasing water clarity of our waters due to zebra mussels, which now appear — at least temporarily — to have eaten so much plankton that their numbers are falling. The clearer water allows deeper sunlight penetration and more photosynthesis.

Leaky septic systems could be a factor, too.

What can riparians do — at a minimum — to lessen the aggregation of GBA where they swim and cool off in the water in front of their properties? Norris noted and a poll of your ESLA board confirmed that disturbing — i.e. swimming, walking around regularly, raking, even dragging a baseball infield groomer — can reduce GBA matting. More on this in future newsletters.

Norris said Elk Rapids high school interns working on Torch L. in the summer were walking around in shallow water on one side of a dock as they tested a different theory. It was clear, Norris said, that the areas where they were walking had reduced GBA.

The ESLA board will investigate possible purchase of rakes designed for weeding ponds and shallow areas. We would distribute them to board members who would loan them out by the day (with security deposits) to ESLA member-neighbors. It won't solve the issue but might help until additional research points to better mitigation.

ELK-SKEGEMOG LAKES ASSOCIATION BOARD MEMBERS

October 2021

Contact: elkskegemoglakes@gmail.com.

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ESLA

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