



A LOOK AT THE LAKE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BURT LAKE PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

MAY

2020

Strange Days

Jim Burke, President

Once upon a time not so long ago, in a land not so far away Americans were enjoying the good life. We could “go where you want to go; do what you want to do with whoever you want to do it with” (John Phillips 1965).

That sure changed in a hurry. To borrow a line from Jim Morrison, “Strange days have found us; strange days have tracked us down.”

It’s going to be a very different summer, my friends. While there is much uncertainty, I can tell you what we do know.

Our May BLPA Board meeting ain’t happening. We plan on meeting in June as scheduled at the Tuscarora Township Hall. For now, phone conversations and group emails are keeping us connected. We collaborate with the U of M Biological Station every year; there will be no students this year. We have partnered with the Tip of The Mitt Watershed Council every year for the past twenty for many activities; this year they have suspended their operations for the summer. That means stream monitoring, which is a group activity will be suspended. Jennifer McKay agreed to be our guest speaker at our annual July meeting to talk about Enbridge Line Five. We’ve cancelled our annual membership meeting. It’s the right thing to do. I’m sure some of our members wouldn’t be comfortable in a large group setting – last year over 200 were in attendance. We will plan to provide an “Annual Report” on our web site to cover most of the annual meeting information. You’ll just have to fix your own brunch. Look for the e-mailed notice when it’s ready.

- Lake water quality monitoring will continue, as it is a singular activity. We’ve been doing that for twenty years.

- We will continue our drone survey for the fourth consecutive year. Last year’s findings were encouraging – it appears that the invasive Eurasian Watermilfoil population is not propagating but we still want to monitor it closely.
- We will probably have our June Board meeting as originally scheduled. We’ll call an audible.
- Our Environment and Land Use Committee is planning to improve the Bair property on the Sturgeon River for improved access by building a trail to the river.
- Dave Steenstra, representing the Burt Lake Sturgeon Club talked with Sturgeon for Tomorrow, Mullett Area Preservation Society, Little Traverse Bay Band, and MDNR in February about collaborating and combining efforts for the benefit of the sturgeon in our waterway. Understandably, that meeting has been postponed but it will happen. This is the next big thing for the Sturgeon Club.

As a goodwill gesture to our business members that advertise in the BLPA directory we have waived fees for this year. None of these businesses are going to have a good year. This is our opportunity to give back to those that have supported us for many years. Please patronize them. Buy their goods and services.

As the summer progresses we’ll return to normal. Not “The new normal”; Normal. Have faith, my friends – this too shall pass. We’ll continue to keep you in the loop. All will be well.

Our very best wishes to all of you and your families in this calamitous period of our world. All will be well.



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Improved Road/Stream Crossings

*Jen Buchanan,
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council*

We've celebrated the building of a bridge where Pickerel Lake Road meets Minnehaha Creek since 2018.. The bridge replaced three undersized culverts that allowed the creek to pass under the road. Even though it might not seem like a big deal, this small act, and other road/stream crossing renovations in the planning stages, will improve the health of the Burt Lake Watershed.



The bridge over Minnehaha Creek is a road/stream crossing, where a road intersects a body of water. Why are road/stream crossings important? Streams at these crossings can sometimes experience difficulties with aquatic connectivity, which is the ability of bodies of water to connect to one another without points of blockage along the way.

Say, for instance, that a culvert diverting a stream beneath a road is too small. Sediment from the stream can build up in the upstream portion of the culvert. Pollution from stormwater runoff could also concentrate in that area. Road/stream crossings that trap debris and pollutants, or culverts that are “perched” above the water level, can also keep fish and other aquatic animals from traveling freely. Finally, a crossing that prevents free water flow can also cause flooding during rainfall as water builds up on the clogged side of the culvert.

A good road/stream crossing, like the bridge above Minnehaha Creek, supports the free movement of water and aquatic life, which in turn supports the health of the Burt Lake Watershed. It allows fish like brook trout to access more miles of suitable habitat for spawning. This is great news for anglers. Having the right size and shape crossing can also prevent downstream erosion and habitat loss.

In order to ensure the health of the Burt Lake Watershed, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council has been concentrating on improving road/stream crossings. In 2014 and 2015, we surveyed crossings in the watershed to determine which ones posed the biggest barriers to fish.

Two road/stream crossing projects have been completed on Minnehaha Creek: the

one at Pickerel Lake Road, and another crossing at Maxwell Road. An additional project is in the works where Banwell Road meets Berry Creek, a tributary to Pickerel Lake. This crossing received a fish passage score of “0,” meaning that it is almost impossible for all species at all life stages to pass through. The undersized culverts on Banwell Road are causing erosion as well. Replacing the culverts with a bridge and stabilizing the stream bank with native vegetation will offer 5.5 more miles of high-quality brook trout habitat.

The Watershed Council has funding for the crossing at Berry Creek and Banwell Road, as well as for a crossing on an unnamed tributary at Snider Road. We have partial funding to improve road/stream crossings on Minnehaha Creek at Berger Road and on Silver Creek at Pickerel Lake Road. These crossings were just some of the 52 crossings identified as complete fish passage barriers during the Burt Lake Watershed surveys.

Funding and project assistance were provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Sustain Our Great Lakes program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish Passage program, the Baiardi Foundation, Patagonia, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Aquatic Habitat program, and the Emmet County Road Commission. For more information, contact Jen Buchanan at Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council at 231-347-1181, or info@watershedcouncil.org.



Tuscarora Township Report

*Mike Cherveney,
Community Affairs*

Tuscarora Township will be submitting their application for a USDA/Rural Development loan by the end of May. The township will know more about the grant feasibility by September after all unallocated grant money from around the nation is pooled up and which projects are determined to be eligible for more grant funding. After the amount of loan and grant money is committed for our project and an estimated assessment amount per Residential Unit is determined then a petition will be circulated to the property owners in the proposed sewer district.

If more than 50% of the land mass approve we will begin the statutory process of establishing a Special Assessment District and the expansion of the sanitary sewer system (phase II) will move forward.

The Tuscarora Township Downtown Development Authority (DDA) received bids on Friday, 5/1/20 for the Streetscape Project. The low bid came in 19% higher than the estimate which left a budget shortfall of \$300,000. The DDA has been given verbal approval from USDA/RD to borrow more money. The project is estimated at \$2,381,000. The DDA anticipates the project to begin this summer. The tentative schedule calls for a sixteen week construction period with a completion date of October 15, 2020. The project will include new street and traffic lighting, new sidewalks and relocated utility poles. S. Straits Hwy. will also be repaved. Currently there are approximately 45-50 utility lines that cross S. Straits Hwy in Indian River's downtown business district. This number will be reduced to fifteen.

The Cheboygan County Road Commission received bids to repave Prospect, Chippewa Beach and Wahbee Rds. on April 28, 2020. The low bid came in slightly lower than the road commission's estimate. Tuscarora Township will call for a Public Hearing at the regularly scheduled meeting on June 2. After the confirmation of the assessment roll the project will begin this summer.

Swimmer's Itch Prevention

Mayo Clinic Staff



The parasites that cause swimmer's itch live in the blood of waterfowl and in mammals that live near ponds and lakes. To reduce the risk of swimmer's itch:

- Choose swimming spots carefully. Avoid swimming in areas where swimmer's itch is a known problem or signs warn of possible contamination. Also avoid swimming or wading in marshy areas where snails are commonly found.
- Avoid the shoreline, if possible. If you're a strong swimmer, head to deeper water for your swim. You may be more likely to develop swimmer's itch if you spend a lot of time in warmer water near the shore.
- Rinse after swimming. Rinse exposed skin with clean water immediately after leaving the water, then vigorously dry your skin with a towel. Launder your swimsuits often.
- Skip the bread crumbs. Don't feed birds on docks or near swimming areas.
- Apply waterproof sunscreen. This has been reported to protect the skin from the parasite that causes swimmer's itch.

A recent BLPA survey indicated the overall presence of swimmer's itch annoyance was relatively low, but concentrated in a few geographic areas. So the board has decided against any chemical remediation for Burt Lake and recommends carefully following the above advice.



Up North

By Michael and Peg Supernault

As we look out on a dreary, almost snow less view, we long for the next snowfall that will turn the scene beautiful again. We await the sight of snowmobiles' headlights on Rails to Trails and ski and snowshoe tracks filling Wildwood Hills. We anticipate the next decade, and reflect on the memories of the past year. With smiles, we think of boat trips, hikes along rivers and time spent with family and friends. Serene sunrises and spectacular sunsets over Burt Lake were highlights this year. Seeing an eagle soar silently overhead, watching bluebirds feed their young and hearing the spring calls of warblers added to our enjoyment of the natural world.



Photo Credit: Tom Prout

Mid-September found Michael paying careful attention to his favorite radio program, “Science Friday”, while observing the bird life before him. The Phobes, Eastern Peewees, hummingbirds and several warbler species were “feeding up” in their preparations for a long fall migratory trip. We feel so fortunate to live in such a beautiful area with such diversity of flora and fauna! We are surrounded by wonderful and interesting things—we only need to pay attention. It is our hope that everyone will maintain or improve their natural area, so we all may pass on this lovely place – unharmed—to the next generation.

September brought much rain as campfires, kayak trips and swimming activities dwindled. Deer and turkeys wandered across our front yard, feeding on acorns. It was bittersweet to clean out the Nature Center for the last time. For over a decade, one or both of us had

taught a Nature Study Field School (“Bug Camp”), and spent so many enjoyable hours with young people indoors and out. We will miss it.

As September morphed into October, trees began to gain autumnal color, and the cast of bird characters changed. Gone were the flashy summer residents; in their place were the more somber winter visitors. Our last warbler was sighted on October 16th, a lone Robin was looking for his buddies on October 23rd, and a very late Sandhill Crane called overhead on November 7th. Our vegetable garden was harvested, with carrots, beets and potatoes in storage. Garlic and onions were dug and dried. The freezer was stocked with peas, beans and corn. As the boards went up on the screenroom, we remembered great meals, wonderful evenings with friends, and many hours listening to the river. There were some warm, beautiful days to boat on Burt, and enjoy the spectacular colors on the hills. This is still one of our favorite times on the lake—enjoying “the last good day of the summer”.

In November, with a little fresh snow on our back walkway, we spotted Badger tracks. We followed the tracks into our field, where they mingled with those of fox, deer, squirrel, turkey, mouse, vole and assorted small birds. The field was the source of dinner for many—seeds of grasses, goldenrod aster and milkweed. The elimination of some of these undigested seeds will become next year’s plants.

Even those brown “dead” plants are critical to the ecosystem around us. All are connected, whether it be the underground fungi, the mosses and lichens on the surface, the integral plants that some call weeds, or dead trees. Each has value—as a food source, a habitat, a shelter or nesting place. This ecology is critical for the survival of mosquitoes, mice, martens and people.

Think for a moment about a standing dead tree. It harbors millions of insects that feed so many other living things. The dead tree is “eaten” by various fungi, and provides shelter for birds, ranging from owls to mergansers. Woodpeckers, Bluebirds, chickadees and Tufted Titmice find respite in dead trees. Hollow spaces in dead trees provide nesting spaces for flying squirrels. If left alone, the tree will eventually fall, becoming a home for an entirely new population: various beetles, salamanders and assorted harmless



Photo Credit: Tom Prout



Photo Credit: Tom Prout

northern snakes. Eventually, the tree returns to the earth much of the material it used during its lifetime.

On November 16th, we awoke to a spectacular sight. A beautiful hoarfrost was clinging to every branch and blade of grass along the Sturgeon. It sparkled in the sunrise as if clothed in diamonds. Fifteen bird species and a young deer feeding by the river added a counterpoint to the cold beauty.

As the sun rose, the hoarfrost fell from the branches, filling the still air with sparkling crystals.

Early in December, we were fascinated by a confrontation between a Goshawk and a squirrel. They were on the opposite sides of the same tree, playing a life-or-death game of hide and seek. Each would peek around the tree, then go back to hiding. Since the Goshawk was on the squirrel's favorite perch, it almost seemed that the squirrel was trying to intimidate the hawk and frighten it off. The hawk was unable to maneuver around the trunk to get at its squirrel lunch. Eventually, the hawk gave up and retreated to another tree. The squirrel loudly proclaimed victory.

Later in the month as temperatures warmed, Michael could be found with an insect net in hand collecting "dancing flies" and winter moths. They were taking advantage of the sunny day. He may have appeared demented to those driving by!

December may not have provided the usual population of winter birds, but it did offer some spectacular

sunrises and sunsets. We were awakened quite early on three successive mornings by our wild neighbors. Two Great-horned Owls used their voices to compete for territory. The next morning, deer pawed through leaves searching for acorns while coyotes howled at the river's edge. On the third morning, two ravens perched outside our open window, talking to each other.

Looking forward to the rest of winter, we will once again take a winter raft trip down the Sturgeon. It is almost time to plan our garden, while looking through the sumptuous pictures in seed catalogues. By early May, we will hope to assist the Sturgeon River Sweepers, as they work to pick up trash and detritus left by humans.

As we finish this, we are privileged to watch the world turn white with snow-frosting. It is so beautiful, and so necessary for so many reasons. Time to ski and 'shoe.

Do not lose sight of—as Carl Sagan called it—"The Pale Blue Dot" where we live. Not only is it our home, it is our responsibility to be good stewards of the lands and waters. In spring, evaluate the ecosystem around you, and see how best you can help. Use native plants in your landscape, mulch to retain water, discover natural remedies for repelling pests.

Happy New Year—we are all looking forward to enjoying the year ahead!



How Old is a Big Burt Lake Walleye?

David Steenstra, BLPA and Tim Cwalinski, Michigan DNR

Have you or someone you know ever caught a nice-sized walleye and wondered how old the fish was? It's an easy question with a difficult answer. Before we attempt to give you a reasonable answer, take a look at your old grade school pictures. In third grade, most of the kids were about the same size, except for a few that were taller and a few that were heavier. By fourth grade, there were a couple of different kids that suddenly bolted up in height. So how tall a fourth grader is, has a lot of different answers. And so it is with a Burt Lake walleye.

Jim Burke and Dave Steenstra attended an inland lakes advisory meeting with the Michigan DNR last year. We asked this very question of Michigan DNR biologist Tim Cwalinski. So, we decided to collect some actual data and prepare a report. In 2011 and again in 2013, creel surveys were conducted by the DNR. Walleyes were netted and a jaw tag was attached to each fish before they were released.

Most studies indicate that it takes 4 to 5 years for a Walleye to reach legal size,

15 inches, with differences between the sexes. But after that, the growth is not infinite. It is asymptotic. Much like you grew like a weed in grade school, you slowed down in high school, and some of us have even shrank a little as we age.

Your take-away from this story is this: there is not a specific size/ growth rate statistic; also, the growth rate in Burt Lake is quite slow. A few of the fish in our chart that were tagged, released, and later caught indicate less than 1 inch of growth in 7 years. That's really slow. If you catch a 30-inch Walleye, it is not 100 years old. It is a fish that grew really big relative to others in the year-class, and is likely a female. So...growth may be slow for walleye in Burt Lake after reaching adulthood, however, longevity can be attained. What does that mean? They can live longer. When fish reach older ages that means that harvest or exploitation is not as high as you might suspect. Fast growth is often attained with an unlimited food supply and higher exploitation rates.

Thank you Tim Cwalinski for your input into this story. If anyone reading this story has doubts, call Tim. He has heard enough "doubt" from Jim and Dave over this topic in the last few months.



The following chart shows the fish caught in 2020.

Date Tagged	Size (in)	Date Caught	Size (in)	Growth/Years
05/02/13	17	02/23/20	20	3 inches, 7 years
04/09/11	15.3	02/15/20	18	2.7 inches, 9 years
04/19/11	15.3	02/16/20	17.5	2.2 inches, 9 years
05/01/13	17.7	01/31/20	18.2	.5 inches, 7 years
04/30/13	15.8	02/07/20	17	1.2 inches, 7 years
05/01/13	17.3	02/07/20	19	1.7 inches, 7 years
04/30/13	16.0	02/06/20	17.3	1.3 inches, 7 years
04/30/13	17.4	01/17/20	18	.6 inches, 7 years



Boat Safely



Burt Lake can get very rough, very quickly. Check the weather before you go out. It may look calm at your house but it can be much worse where you're going. Wear a life jacket (They're required on paddle boards, kayaks and PWC's.) Make sure someone knows you're going out, and when you expect to return. And make sure that transom drain plug is in.

Sturgeon Advisory Council

Jim Burke, David Steenstra

On Thursday, February 20, Jim Burke and Dave Steenstra represented Burt Lake at the annual Sturgeon Advisory Council meeting held at Tuscarora Township Hall. Other organizations represented included Sturgeon For Tomorrow, Michigan DNR, Mullett Area Preservation, Tribal Fisheries Biologists, Black Lake Association, Michigan State University, U.S. Coastguard, and the Otsego Lake Association. Wow! What a group. All the discussions were about one topic - - Sturgeon.

Thanks to Sturgeon For Tomorrow and the Sturgeon General, Brenda Archambo, the Black Lake Sturgeon populations are doing very well. Congratulations to the following successful fishermen who harvested 6 Sturgeon during the annual Black Lake Sturgeon season held on February 1, 2020:

One of our other discussion topics was of course Burt Lake and Mullett Lake. We feel it is time we develop a

plan to inevitably open a Sturgeon season on our lakes as well. All those at the meeting agreed, including the DNR leadership. We are beginning the discussions this year. Stay tuned for more information as this process unfolds. Be patient. It will take years to get everyone on the same page, but at least we are starting the process.

1. Dan Mose	60 inches	51 pounds
2. Cole Hudson	49 inches	24 pounds
3. David Schmidt	47 inches	19 pounds
4. Chris Wilson	65 inches	57 pounds
5. Mike Crawford	44 inches	16 pounds
6. Mike Jewell	75 inches	100 pounds

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BLPA Board of Directors meetings are normally the second Saturday of the month at 8:30, Tuscarora Township Hall, Indian River.

The deadline for the next newsletter is OCTOBER 1, 2020. Contact editor John Roberts with suggestions: darbyburt@icloud.com

Visit www.blpa.org or facebook.com/burtlakepreservationassociation.

Photo Credit: Albert Sickinger