



## MICHIGAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

Winter 2026

**MWA Mission Statement** "This corporation is formed to protect, preserve and promote the wise use of inland waters – lakes, streams, rivers, creeks and the waters and bottomlands of the State of Michigan."

Dear Michigan Waterfront Alliance Individual and Lake Association Members,

Your MWA Board of directors wishes you a Happy New Year! Your support has enabled the Alliance to help build awareness in Lansing, of the value and importance of Michigan's inland lakes and streams. Special thanks go to our lake champions who, with a combined donation of over \$4000, have enabled the Alliance to continue to afford our lobbyist, Karoub Associates, and fund vital Lake and Stream Legislative efforts.

Following are brief summaries of what the MWA is supporting and lobbying for:

**Progress regarding the effort to fund Aquatic Invasive Species prevention and remediation.**  
**HOUSE BILL NO. 5308**

December 02, 2025, Introduced by Reps. Borton, Aragona, Bohnak, Markkanen, Martin, Roth, Prestin, Outman, DeBoyer, St. Germaine, Mentzer and VanderWall and referred to Committee on Natural Resources and Tourism.

A bill to amend 1994 PA 451, entitled "Natural resources and environmental protection act," by amending section 80124a (MCL 324.80124a), as amended by 2005 PA 271.

The people of the State of Michigan enact: **Sec. 80124a.**

(1) The secretary of state shall make available for purchase an annual Great Lakes protection specialty watercraft decal. The Great Lakes protection specialty watercraft decal shall be designed by the secretary of state and shall depict some aspect of the Great Lakes or of Great Lakes water quality.

(2) The Great Lakes protection specialty watercraft decal shall be sold for \$35.00. Revenues from the sale of Great Lakes specialty watercraft decals shall be expended as provided for in section 80124b.

(3) The secretary of state may establish the appropriate placement of Great Lakes protection specialty watercraft decals on watercraft so as not to create confusion for law enforcement officers with decals required under section 80124.

Progression: It has been referred to the House Natural Resources and Tourism Committee for review.

Sunset Clause: The Secretary of State is required to discontinue sales if the decal does not meet specific minimum sales targets (at least 500 per fiscal year).

For standard registration and renewal of mandatory decals in Michigan, boaters can use the Michigan Secretary of State (SOS) Online Services.

## **Some progress on a Statewide Septic Ordinance:**

The final FY 2025-26 General Omnibus budget bill (House Bill 4706), that passed the Legislature and was signed into law, retained the \$7 million one-time funding for the septic system database effort under EGLE's appropriations. This funding does not in itself create a statewide septic code, but it provides money to begin building a statewide database of septic systems, tracking permitting and assessments, and laying groundwork for future statewide regulation. Separate legislation (e.g., HB 5732/HB 5733 or Senate bills) would still be required to enact regulatory requirements.

## **Michigan Waterfront Alliance Extends a Heartfelt Thank You to Departing Board of Directors Members** by Scott Brown MWA Vice-President

The Officers and Directors of Michigan Waterfront Alliance are pleased to extend a hearty thank you and farewell to recently departed members of our Board of Directors as they enter the next chapter of their lives.

**Nancy Beckwith**, has been our dependable and decade-long serving Secretary, who we could always count on to fulfill this important multi-tasking role expeditiously and accurately. She was never afraid to ask questions to help ensure the pin-point accuracy of her meeting notes. For example, our currently serving Officers and Directors may be certain that a detailed history of our organization could be composed utilizing her always accurate meeting minutes. Thank you, Nancy, for your important contributions to the Michigan Waterfront Alliance!!!

**Ralph Bednarz**, whose willingness to share his in-depth knowledge of lake science always served our freshwater conservation-focused organization well, served as a Director on the Michigan Waterfront Alliance's Board of Directors. He served as our primary source of information regarding lake science and was our primary "go to" person within the MI Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) Water Resources Division for lake science and water quality issues. It is important to note that Ralph also played an instrumental role in the establishment of the highly successful Michigan Clean Water Corps Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program. Thank you, Ralph, for your considerable contributions to the Michigan Waterfront Alliance.

## **Welcome Jason Broekstra to the MWA Board of Directors**

Your Michigan Waterfront Alliance Board of Directors is pleased to welcome Jason Broekstra to the MWA Board. Jason is a biologist and senior executive at PLM Lake & Land Management Corp., a large U.S. company specializing in lake and land ecosystem services, particularly aquatic plant and invasive species management. He joined PLM in 1995 and has worked in various technical and leadership roles for nearly three decades. In 2026 he was promoted to President and Chief Executive Officer and serves on the company's corporate board. The MWA is very fortunate to have such a high caliber professional join the board. Jason is also the president of the Michigan Aquatic Managers Association, and he is a member of the Michigan Inland Lakes partnership.



## **Higgins Lake Swimmers Itch Organization (HLSIO UPDATE) for Michigan Waterfront Alliance**

To control Swimmer's Itch on Higgins Lake, it is necessary to remove Mergansers from the lake (or the *T. Stagnicolae* snail...a much harder process). Unfortunately, there was a cancellation of relocation permits for all ducks across the country earlier this year by the USFW due to concerns about Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI, aka Avian Flu). Therefore, no ducks were removed, and a few broods took up residence on the Lake. The increase in Swimmer's Itch (SI) was relatively minimal based on our scientific efforts. However, self-reported SI cases have increased markedly.

## Additional Background

- Swimmer's Itch is a result of a two-host combination, frequently in Michigan, the Common Merganser duck and the *T. Stagnicolae* host snail. Simply put, infected duck feces contain parasites that look for snails. Once infected, the snails create another parasite that looks for ducks. The snails can create up to 10,000 parasites a day. When these parasites find and enter human pores, the dermatological condition known as Swimmers Itch can occur.
- The year started off with considerable optimism. HLSIO had our permits in order, both from the DNR and the Roscommon Commissioners to allow us to capture and relocate mergansers. Both permits were necessary for us to proceed. All systems go? Nope, our optimism soon faded dramatically, as the US Fish & Wildlife on April 14, 2025 canceled all relocation permits for Michigan (and other states) due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI, also referred to more commonly as Avian Flu).
  - HLSIO continued with our bird surveys which showed some mergansers on Higgins Lake this Spring, resulting in four broods on the lake for this summer.
- SI cases – HLSIO has been conducting a water exposure study, conducted annually since 2022. This is among users of the lake who report their experience after being in the water. In total there were nearly 300 reports, representing over 1100 people enjoying the water. Additionally, we had many people reporting cases of SI on our website (HLSIO.org)
  - The good news is the Water Exposure study showed NO increase in SI prevalence; in fact, it showed a slight decline from last year. However, our website reports of SI increased substantially, with over twice as many SI reported cases versus last year. Many of these cases were from the later half of the summer. It is unclear why there is a discrepancy between the two sources of SI reports, whether it is due to more HLSIO.org awareness, or other factors such as precautions taken, where they swim/play, etc. That said, we did expect some increase in SI cases due to the broods on the lake.

## Going Forward

- Merganser Relocation Status — We are meeting with the DNR, communicating with USFW in order to get clarity on plans for 2026. We have the ability to field test for presence of Avian Flu, as well as inject ducks with an anti-parasitic drug, praziquantel, which has been used safely for decades in farm and domestic animals. This would kill the parasites but not prevent reintroduction. However, it would reduce the overall cercariae temporarily and should help reduce SI until our relocation program can be reinstated.
  - Our overall emphasis is that *relocating a few migratory birds, pretested for Avian Flu, to a location that already has mergansers will not contribute to the Avian Flu problem.*

Currently, we are waiting for DNR/USFW feedback for 2026. If no relocation/praziquantel is authorized for 2026, we expect higher Swimmers Itch cases. This would be a problem for our area and may impact tourism. We are taking actions to keep communications open and remain hopeful but highly concerned.

## CURRENT STATUS OF SHORT-TERM RENTALS W. Dane Carey-Attorney at Law January 5, 2026

In July 2025, the Michigan Supreme Court, in a 3-3 split decision (*Berlin Trust v Rubin*), affirmed the Court of Appeals ruling upholding that private lake community covenants restricting property to "single-family residence purposes" can legally prohibit short-term rentals (STRs), reinforcing that such rentals are seen as commercial, not purely residential, uses in these contexts. This decision doesn't create new statewide zoning law but solidifies precedent for HOAs and private communities to enforce existing restrictive covenants against STRs, leaving lower court decisions intact.

### **Key Points of Ruling:**

- **Case:** *Melvin R. Berlin Revocable Trust et al. v Thomas C. Rubin et al.*
- **Outcome:** Affirmed the Court of Appeals decision by an equal division (3-3 split).
- **Impact:** Private communities can be existing "single-family" use restricted to ban short-term rentals.
- **Reasoning:** The court found short-term rentals are a commercial activity, not consistent with a permanent residential purpose, even if the covenant doesn't explicitly mention STRs.

### **What This Means for Michigan:**

- **HOA/Condo Power:** Homeowners' Associations and private communities can generally prohibit STRs if their covenants restrict use to "residential" or "single-family" purposes.
- **No New Statewide Law:** It reinforces existing case law rather than establishing a new statewide zoning rule for all municipalities.

### **Statewide AIS Survey**

Gerrish Township in Roscommon County has begun a Township initiative called the Health of Higgins Lake (HOHL). Gerrish is one of three townships bordering Higgins Lake. The initiative has multiple objectives, all focused upon understanding, improving and protecting the Higgins Lake area. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) is a primary focus of the HOHL.

HOHL understands AIS affects all Michigan Lakes. The HOHL is interested in learning what other Michigan inland lakes are doing to combat/prevent AIS. The Michigan Waterfront Alliance was asked by the HOHL's AIS Subcommittee to request information from Michigan Lake Associations and Individual Michigan Waterfront Alliance members who are actively involved in AIS prevention and remediation. If you are involved in an AIS program or are aware of anyone who is, the HOHL would like to communicate with you. Please email your contact information to John Ogren at [djogren@gmail.com](mailto:djogren@gmail.com).

### **PFAS and Our Inland Lakes: Sources, Impacts, and Protection Resources**

Dr. Jennifer L. Jermalowicz-Jones, CLP, CLM, Restorative Lake Sciences, Taylor Suttorp, MS, Restorative Lake Sciences and Lorenne Gilbert, BS, Restorative Lake Sciences

#### Background

With the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, pollution has become an ever growing issue. Many synthetic chemicals that were created for the ease of business and industry have been discovered over the past fifty years to have negative impacts on the environment, wildlife, and human health. One current class of synthetic chemicals that has been found to cause irreparable damage are what are known as "forever chemicals" or PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). PFAS refers to an organic chemical with a fluoride atom attached to a carbon atom chain (Citation) and is one of the strongest bonds in organic chemistry. This leads to its popular use in industry for repelling water and oil, as well as resisting heat and chemical reactions. PFAS chemicals like PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid) and PFOS (perfluoro octane sulfonate) are resistant to any kind of degradation which allows these compounds to stay and build up in the environment indefinitely. With the inability to break down, this not only leads to environmental pollution and toxicity, but also impacts human health.

#### Exposure

PFAS and other forever chemicals are introduced to the environment in many different ways. Water, soil, and air can become contaminated with PFAS from industrial spills from manufacturing sites, firefighting foam during training or emergencies, and leaching from landfills. PFAS can travel long distances as small traces have been found as far away as the Arctic and in all oceans, and they accumulate over time. PFAS can contaminate drinking water when products

that are manufactured with forever chemicals are used or spilled into lakes and rivers. The most common exposure to PFAS is ingestion from food and drinking water. Produce, meat, eggs, and dairy can become contaminated by exposure near PFAS manufacturing sites and accumulation within crop soil for produce and feed, as well as water sources for livestock and fish. The United States has stopped producing PFAO and PFOS within the last two decades, but consumer products made with these forever chemicals are found through imported goods. PFAS manufacturing companies have switched to using other PFAS substitutes like PFBS (Perfluorobutanesulfonic acid) and PFBA (Perfluoro butyrate) that consist of shorter carbon chains, but there hasn't been enough data collected to know the long-term risks.

### Sources of PFAS in Inland Lakes

If PFAS is detected in inland waters, the sources usually originate from industrial effluents or from chemicals that enter storm drains that empty into the water bodies. Additional sources may include usage of water repellent industrial or household chemicals that are dumped onto lawns or in drains or from some substances entering the lake from septic systems that leach through the drain fields. While PFAS may result in a whitish-colored foam, much of the time such foam is comprised of dissolved organic matter that is natural for inland lakes and not a pollutant. For this reason, it is always recommended to have PFAS testing to confirm the presence and concentration of PFAS.

### Side Effects

Health issues from PFAS exposure can consist of pregnancy complications such as fertility issues, preeclampsia, and fetal and child development. PFAS has been classified as a carcinogen, and studies found that exposure can increase risks of testicular and kidney cancer, as well as other cancers. Other side effects from PFAS exposure are high cholesterol, liver damage, thyroid disease, and asthma. Studies have shown that most people have been exposed to low levels of PFAS due to the common use and accumulation around the world. However, these risks are associated with high concentration, duration, and frequency with exposure to PFAS and other forever chemicals.

### Mitigation and Monitoring

The carbon chains in forever chemicals are so strong that current water treatment plants are unable to filter them out. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is experimenting with new ways to remove PFAS by using charcoal (granular activated carbon or GAC) absorption, ion exchange resins, and reverse osmosis through high-pressure membranes. These filters can be applied at water entry points for water treatment facilities, hospitals, individual buildings, and homes. They are available for purchase by the average consumer, but it is important to note that they do not currently meet the new requirements the EPA has set for drinking water standards. However, they are still highly recognized for reducing exposure to PFAS in drinking water. For water that is suspected to be contaminated with PFAS, samples can be sent to certified labs that use Method 573, EPA's requirement for testing for PFAS.

As for mitigating contaminated soil, switching to crops that take up less PFAS and adding protection between livestock and the soil are practices that are currently being studied to limit exposure in food.

With common consumer goods like microwave popcorn, nonstick cookware, cleaning products, take-out containers, and fast-food wrappers regularly being manufactured with PFAS, limiting use of these items and researching companies that provide PFAS-free options will help keep exposure at low levels. Using high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters and vacuuming regularly can help remove PFAS particles from the air and dust.

When working with, or in close proximity to, PFAS chemicals, it is important to wear PPE (personal protective equipment) to help minimize exposure. Blood tests can be taken to monitor PFAS levels in the body if health issues are suspected to be related to exposure.

## **Conclusions**

Exposure to PFAS, and other forever chemicals, seems to be inevitable as they are found almost everywhere due to the chemicals' resilience, ability to travel, accumulation, and lack of degradation over time. However, the best way to limit exposure is to opt for products and practices that are PFAS-free, using PFAS water filters, researching local exposure in public and private waterways, and participating in and advocating for policies that regulate PFAS manufacturing and exposure. Continue to inform others and encourage more studies to be conducted on the long-term effects that PFAS and other forever chemicals have on the environment and public health.

If there is concern for PFAS water contamination, an 18-analyte test kit that uses EPA Method 537.1 can be purchased from The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) Drinking Water Laboratory for \$290. This kit can be ordered directly by calling 517-335-8184 and includes a return UPS shipping label.

Additionally, a Great Lakes PFAS Action Network has been created for safer fish consumption through mapping of Michigan lakes that contain PFOS. This site is regularly updated as new data is collected and can be found at: <https://www.glpn.org/>

## **Sign-Up Today for Michigan Waterfront Alliance's Twice Monthly Water Resource Focused e-Newsletter**

For readers of this newsletter who are interested in keeping abreast of the latest news and information regarding the management and science of Michigan's wealth of inland, lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands, or have relatives, friends and/or neighbors who may also be interested, Michigan Waterfront Alliance extends an invitation to sign-up to receive a free twice-monthly e-newsletter via your personal or association e-mail address.

Covering the latest news originating from Michigan's natural resource management agencies, information associated with the preservation of your riparian rights, aquatic invasive species identification and eradication, fish identification and management, inland lake management, and the latest information in regard to water resources, related legislation being considered in Lansing, our twice-monthly digital newsletter is published to help keep you well informed.

There are two ways to begin receiving our twice monthly e-newsletter:

- Become an annual dues paying member of Michigan Waterfront Alliance by visiting our website found at [michiganwaterfrontalliance.com](http://michiganwaterfrontalliance.com); or
- Send an e-mail to our e-newsletter publisher and include the names and e-mails of other folks you know who may be interested in receiving our newsletter to [scottb1952@gmail.com](mailto:scottb1952@gmail.com)

We would also encourage those who currently receive our e-newsletter to become dues paying members of our organization. Keep in mind that our only source of income is derived from membership dues. Your annual dues allow us to maintain a voice for protecting our water resources and your riparian rights in Lansing.

## **You have the Power**

How much Power does one Individual have? Not much when it comes to getting something done in Lansing. But when we work together, we have a lot of power. The Michigan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) gives us the opportunity to work together to reach our senators and representatives, as concerned citizens of our lakes, rivers and streams in Michigan. As a 501(c)(4) organization, we have the power to reach our senators and representatives, that many other statewide lake organizations may not have.

When was the last time that you contacted your senator or representative about an issue that concerns your lake, river or stream? The Michigan Waterfront Alliance and our lobbyist, who works for you, are in constant contact with our senators and representatives in regards to issues that affect our lakes, rivers, and streams. As you can imagine, it takes a lot of time and effort to

reach out to all our senators and representatives. Even though your Michigan Waterfront Alliance board members are all volunteers, it still takes your financial support to keep your Michigan Waterfront Alliance going. As a new year begins, please consider becoming a "My Healthy Lake Champion." You can become a Gold Lake Champion by donating \$1,000, a Silver Lake Champion by donating \$500, a Bronze Lake Champion by donating \$250, or a Copper Lake Champion by donating \$150. Remember, even though your lake, river or stream may be taking a winter break, issues regarding them are still being acted upon in Lansing. We also need to reach out to more individuals to help us in our effort to protect our lakes, rivers and streams. Please talk to your neighbors, family and friends about joining the Michigan Waterfront Alliance. It is a small price to pay to protect our waterways.

Best Regards,

Your Michigan Waterfront Alliance Board of Directors

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**Michigan Waterfront Alliance Annual Membership Dues for 2026 Payable by February 28, 2026  
(or for lake associations, until association board approval)**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Lake or Stream Association: \_\_\_\_\_

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership dues \$75	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Lake Association Memberships dues \$150	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporation Membership dues \$200	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> My Healthy Lake Champion - Dues Included with all Champions	\$ _____
Gold \$1000 <input type="checkbox"/> Silver \$500 <input type="checkbox"/> Bronze \$250 <input type="checkbox"/> Copper \$150 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal Assistance Fund	\$ _____
	Total Enclosed \$ _____

Please Make Checks payable to: Michigan Waterfront Alliance  
Mail to: MWA, P.O. Box 392, Mecosta, MI 49332-0392

(For recording only) Membership # \_\_\_\_\_ Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Date received: \_\_\_\_\_



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