

PROTECTING OUR LAKES
SINCE 1966



THREE LAKES
ASSOCIATION

Lake Bellaire, Clam Lake and Torch Lake

2023 - 2024

ANNUAL SUMMARY

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Recent Activity

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Our Mission:

Provide leadership to preserve, protect, and improve the environmental quality of the Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed for all generations with emphasis on Lake Bellaire, Clam Lake, Torch Lake and their tributaries.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Volunteer Lake Monitoring

TLA has been monitoring water quality in Bellaire, Clam, and Torch Lakes for over twenty years to determine long term trends and detect early warning signals. Monitoring consists of water clarity measurements and Chlorophyll-a samples every two weeks. Mid-lake phosphorous samples are taken in the Spring and Fall to keep an eye on nutrient levels. Our data is sent to the Watershed Council which publishes an annual report on the trophic status of each lake and water quality trends.



Aerial GBA Monitoring

TLA board member Art Hoadley made this year's first bi-annual survey flight of the Torch Lake and Lake Bellaire shorelines in early May. He has been keeping an eye on GBA in our lakes for over twelve years averaging more than 1000 pictures per flight. They help us understand both multi-year and seasonal growth trends and are being used by Dr. Jan Stevenson as part of his GBA research activities.



GBA Research

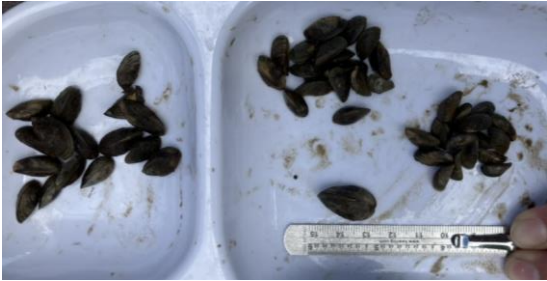
Our work with Dr. Jan Stevenson to find out why Golden Brown Algae has increased in abundance in Torch Lake continues this year. Shallow water samples were collected at six sites around Torch Lake in May and June as part of the twenty site survey project. Dr. Stevenson also sampled six deep water sites in May. He will be correlating his observations with TLA aerial photographs. At the request of the new Hayo-Went-Ha CEO, campers will have an opportunity to view our sampling work and ask questions about water quality projects. TLA research is being coordinated with a USGS study sponsored by Torch Lake Protection Alliance. In combination, these studies hope to identify whether human activities led to an increased abundance of benthic algae.



RECENT ACTIVITIES

Summer Intern Program

This summer three students from area high schools are studying the density of invasive mussels upstream of Torch Lake. Carter Massey of Bellaire H.S. and Annabelle England and Addison Novath of Kalkaska H.S., are being led by program manager and former TLA executive director Jeannie Williams. Along with their adult mentors and volunteer boat captains the interns are spending their Thursday mornings collecting samples along transects of Clam Lake, Grass River and Lake Bellaire. Zebra mussels were found to be present in each waterbody but only two small Quagga mussels were identified, both in Lake Bellaire. Zebra mussels in Lake Bellaire were found most abundant at a depth of around forty feet. Video of the sampling device approaching the bottom of the lake produced images similar to the mussel colonies seen in video of the deeper waters of Torch Lake collected last summer, confirming that much of the extent of the invasive mussel infestation in our lakes lies beyond observation by most lake users. The interns will also be evaluating a technique to compare the mussel colonization rate between lakes. Special crates containing hard surfaces were placed in each of the waterbodies this Spring. The interns will be retrieving some of the plates in August to learn how many mussel larvae have attached themselves to these surfaces.



Eurasian Water Milfoil

The Invasive Plant team conducted its annual observations at fifteen sites in mid-July. In addition to direct observation from the surface, they are also using an underwater camera to confirm the presence of EWM. Treatment actions will take place in early September wherever necessary. Growth was light to modest for this time of year at previously treated sites which confirmed the effectiveness of last year's control strategies. TLA has joined forces with members of Torch Lake Protection Alliance to monitor and treat the known sites of invasive Eurasian Water Milfoil in Torch Lake.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Community Education

Our annual event in July was held at the Shanty Creek Beach Club pavilion and brought interested members of the public together in a relaxing atmosphere to learn about important issues affecting our lakes and the environment. Attendees learned about fish stocking and health issues impacting the local fishery from DNR fisheries biologist Heather Hettinger. Deana Jerdee, Executive director of Paddle Antrim, highlighted their organization's efforts to promote water safety and enjoyment and local volunteer Gary Westerfeld gave an update on efforts needed to protect oak trees from oak wilt which is threatening trees in our watershed. Attendees also heard an update on issues facing the Bellaire Waste Water Treatment Plant. TLA is following changes required by the State to bring the plant back into permit compliance. We are tracking the monthly discharge monitoring reports, paying close attention to limits on the phosphorus released and working with the enforcement division of the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy to make sure effluent quality limits will not be relaxed at permit renewal scheduled for October this year. The event also included our first silent auction that raised more than \$1800 in support of the Science Education Outreach Program (SEOP) which provides grants to local teachers for science based field trips and projects. Thank you to everyone who participated in the silent auction!



RECENT ACTIVITIES

E. coli Monitoring

The first samples from Eastport and Wilkinson Creek for E. coli monitoring were collected in July by the sampling team of Trish Narwold and Bob Milliron. Additional samples will be collected from other tributaries later this summer. Director Emeritus Becky Norris is handling the required paperwork and shuttling samples to the lab within the required six hour time window. If bacteria levels are sufficiently high they will be analyzed using molecular techniques to determine if the source is human.



Science Education Outreach Program

The goal of SEOP is to help cultivate stewardship of the environment in young people who are the next generation that will care for our watershed. Our goal is to work with science teachers in the school districts of Central Lake, Bellaire, Kalkaska, and Mancelona. This year we awarded grants to thirteen teachers, providing just under \$7000 for hands-on activities and field trips that encourage the future stewards of our lakes to love and appreciate our natural resources.



Grants and Funding

A \$1000 grant from **Paddle Antrim's "Ripple Effect" grant program** is helping to offset costs of our Golden Brown Algae research in Torch Lake. Local businessman **Gordy Schafer** made a \$3000 donation in the name of long time board member Todd Collins who passed away in July, to TLA's SEOP. The **Gerrit Lee Wierda Memorial Fund** helps to fund our internship program. **The Dole Family Foundation** helps to fund our water quality studies and TLA applied to the Dole Family Foundation for funding to cover additional expenses related to this year's intern program. We sincerely appreciate the funding of our work to preserve and protect our waters!





**Our members and donors make the important work of TLA possible.
Thank you for your commitment to water protection!**

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