



# Les Cheneaux Islands Association

## Winter Newsletter

February ~ 2017

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### President's Message

*Dave Robertson*

WINTER! If it is Groundhog Day, then pitchers and catchers report in another 12 days. Oh, and Memorial Day can't be far off, Bill Murray notwithstanding. My sources in LCI tell me this winter has seen an alternating mix of winter and spring-like weather. There has been snow, but the ice is spotty in many channels with repeated freezes and thaws. Quite different from recent years which gave us lots of solid ice lasting into May. Global warming? It is too early to know the effect on the lake level. You simply must observe it this summer with your own eyes.

For you many snowbirds, you should know that Clark Twp. does not hibernate during the cold, dark months. Wildlife abounds, people work and recreate, and boats are rehabbed. Snowfest is a great opportunity to experience LCI. It happens every President's Day Weekend. Try it!

Those unwilling to experience the ice and snow instead can peruse the LCIA website and Facebook page. LCIA has entered the modern world, so take advantage to keep abreast of news and views. 721 people now have "liked" the Facebook page, so your comments, photos, and posts reach a wide audience. "Like" LCIA's FB page to remain con-

nected to your LCI friends and neighbors year-round. The website also has lots of useful information.

As winter advances, remember that your LCIA dues support two important functions: storage of LCIA's navigational buoys until spring; and the off-season property inspections. Your property is visited every two weeks by one of our intrepid men. If you have not heard from your inspector or local contractor or caretaker, that is a good thing: meaning that your property is slumbering unscathed so far. Assuming they can reach properties on islands, given the spotty ice conditions this winter, the inspectors know your property and what to look for, as most of them have worked for LCIA for many years. Hopefully, you will not receive any distress calls.

LCIA, as does any other voluntary organization, can function only so long as people give of their time and energy to advance its mission. More people are needed to share their time and talents with LCIA. We compete with other worthy organizations in the area and must involve the younger generations. If you have interest in helping, please contact Esther or any of the officers. We can put you to work!

This looks to be an exciting year, with not only the usual events at July 4 and the Annual Meeting, but also as Ensign Fleet 31/LCYC hosts the 2017 Ensign Class National Championship Regatta, August 13-17. Visit the Ensign Fleet 31 website for more information.

Enjoy the rest of the winter and spring. Before long, it will be time to head north for summer 2017. Incidentally, I am advised the Chicago Cubs intend to repeat [sorry Clevelanders].

### News from the Water Safety & Youth Boating Certification Committee

*Dave Robertson, Chair*

WINTER! It means a different kind of noisy machine is cruising the channels, at least where the ice is solid enough. If you are snowmobiling this winter, be careful, lest you go through the ice!

The principal activity of the Committee is to facilitate the water safety class, taught by Deputy Tom Sherlund. Young boaters must be licensed and are encouraged to take the Youth Boating Safety Course. More mature boaters always are welcome for "continuing boating education".

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Two sessions are held each summer, early July and Boat Show week. In summer 2016 over 60 students took the class, ranging in age from 10 to 65+. Many adults sat in, both for their own benefit and/or to give moral support to their [grand]children. The adults all agreed the course was valuable, both learning new information and "re-learning" a few forgotten facts.

**The 2017 classes will be conducted at CEDAR COVE ASSISTED LIVING'S conference room on Tuesday and Wednesday July 11 & 12, and August 8 & 9, from 6-9 pm.**

The Committee welcomes new members; minimal work and time is required. Anyone who wishes to join our cause is most welcome. Please contact Esther or me.

AND NOW: a pop quiz [from the 2004 Boater Course Exam]:

If while boating at night you see a green and a white light, you must: a) speed up and go past the other craft quickly; b) give-way and let the other vessel pass; c) shine your spotlight in the eyes of the other boater; d) maintain course and speed, but remain aware of the other vessel.

Enjoy the remaining winter and spring. Sooner than you think, it will be time to head north for summer 2017. Happy and safe use of the LCI bays and channels in all seasons.

ANSWER TO QUIZ: b

## Manager's Report

*Mark Engle*

### Winter Weather & Ice Update

The Les Cheneaux area saw some snowy periods between Thanksgiving and Christmas, making it seem as though winter was settling in. After the first of the year, however, temperatures began to rise. There was rain, freezing rain, fog and generally several weeks of thawing and melting. Ice fishing and snowmobiling came to a stop as fishermen scrambled to get shanties off dangerous ice and conditions for travel became impossible. Easterly winds blew some frisky Lake Huron water into the East Entrance and Middle Entrance breaking up ice, so, here we are with some open water in Government and Musky Bays. Colder weather has frozen the surface again, but so far we don't have a normal layer of solid ice. Snow is in the upcoming weather forecast as are high temps below freezing, but so far just two nightly lows have been below zero.

Lake Huron water level predictions are fairly close to 2016, which is slightly higher than the historic average. The water level dropped 6-8 inches prior to freeze-up.

### LCIA Property Inspections

LCIA inspectors made bi-monthly property checks by boat to island residences as conditions allowed. The area did experience some high winds causing some reports of downed trees and trees on electric service lines. Since freeze-up, some remote areas have not been accessible due to weather and poor ice conditions. Security has been very good, so far inspectors have reported no serious incidents. Our inspectors are very dependable; whether by boat or snowmobile or snowshoe or truck or on foot, the job is in good hands.

The Cedarville/Hessel area has been getting regular patrolling from State Police and County Sheriff's Dept. which is reassuring for our security.

### Fish and Game Report

Ice fishing was just getting good when warm weather and rain chased most fishermen off the ice. Ice suitable for travel did not form until the third week of January. There have been some good catches of perch in Hessel Bay and Musky Bay; exact locations in those bays is a big secret. Northern pike have been caught in Musky Bay around Reif's Point.

The local deer herd has benefitted from warm weather; bare ground in some places has provided some mid-winter food. The Upper Peninsula deer population has been reduced over the past few years; hopefully this winter will be good for them.

Cormorant control in the Les Cheneaux Islands has ceased due to a federal court ruling last May. Even though the largest concentration of the fish eating bird is in the Great Lakes, and Goose Island is home to the largest rookery in the United States, our fish stocks are again threatened by cormorant over population.

### Clark Township News

The bridge to Hill Island is due to be replaced this year. Funding is in place to begin the project which will widen the bridge from 25 feet to 48 feet. Also, culverts will be added to the causeway increasing water flow. The Hill Island Bridge will cost \$750,000 with Clark Township supporting through millage a total of \$37,500.

The North Huron Scenic Advisory Committee is heading up an effort to widen the paved shoulder on M-134 between Cedarville and Hessel. The goal is to provide a better, safer path for bicycle traffic. The committee is seeking new members for input and planning. They meet on the first Wednesday each month at 10:00 am at the Clark Township office. If interested, please contact Amy Polk at the Les Cheneaux Chamber & Tourist Association Office, 484-3935.

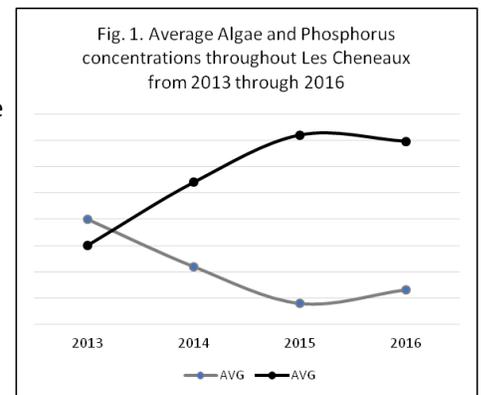
**LCI Water Quality in 2016**

The recreational quality of our waters remained excellent during 2016. In fact, laboratory analysis of our waters has remained high and desirable since Mike Grant first began detailed analysis in 1994 at the Univ. Michigan Biological Station at Douglas Lake. More dense weed growth became an issue for boating during times of recent low water levels in the 2003-2012 era but the quality of our water did not suffer from nuisance algae blooms that affect waters with extreme nutrient loading issues such as Lake Erie. Yes, we had cases of swimmer’s itch during the low water times but that was more an issue of some individuals feeding waterfowl, which are hosts to swimmer’s itch organisms, in their beach areas than a reflection the overall LCI water quality.

LCIA supports water quality monitoring at 12 sites throughout the islands from Marquette Bay to Strongs Island each summer. In general, both phosphorus and algae concentrations were lower in 2015-2016 than the previous two years and the recreational quality of LCI waters remains in the highly desirable range. Nutrients in the form of phosphorus and algae levels are monitored to identify annual water quality shifts. Phosphorus levels are used to indicate how much algae growth can be expected and the algae densities are monitored as a check on the phosphorus values.

We have observed a steady annual decrease in algae concentrations throughout the islands from 2013 through 2016 as shown in Fig. 1. The algae population decline parallels observations of decreased invasive milfoil growth as reported elsewhere, but is there a connection?

In 2015 we had algae populations one quarter of the levels measured in 2013 and that pattern continued through the 2016 sampling season. Algae concentration typically follows phosphorus levels but, as seen in Fig. 1., this expected pattern has changed since 2013 where the soluble form of phosphorus available as nutrient to the algae increased, possibly due to less demand by the algae. Reasons for the decline in algae concentrations within the islands are not obvious. Water temperatures do not seem to be a major factor and zebra mussel populations appear to remain stable. Could an influx of the more nutrient poor water from the open lake be reflected in lower phosphorus and algae concentrations in 2015 and 2016? One argument that favors this possibility is that a three foot rise in lake level (yes, 38 inches) over three seasons essentially diluted the available nutrients within our channels. In more shallow bays, such as Sheppard and Cedarville, nutrients available in 2015 and 2016 were about one half the amount available in 2013 for a specific volume of water. Less food in the form of phosphorus translates to less algae growth. Other thoughts from readers?

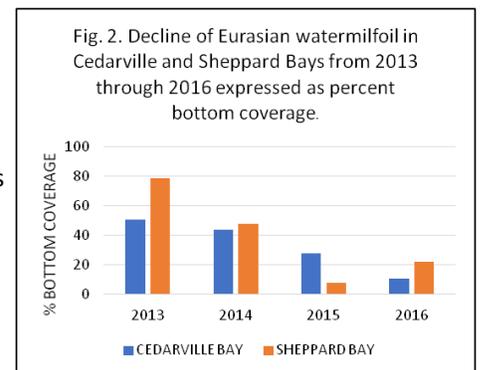


**Milfoil Still Missing - Where did it go?**

**Water level up: Weeds down.** Does it get any better than that? Fortunately, this is the same phrasing used for last year’s winter update on the weeds.

Although some of you might have had a degree of Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) issues last summer, the vast majority of shoreline property owners, fishermen and pleasure boaters have been thankful that it has almost disappeared. An exception is the marinas where EWM persists. A key effort by the Watershed Council in 2017 will be to minimize EWM at high density growth areas.

Following the intense EWM growth in 2012 we have measured progressively less growth each of the last four years. In fact, studies conducted by the Watershed Council have shown that the actual number of EWM plants in Sheppard and Cedarville Bays was 50% less in 2014 than in 2013 and another 50% less in 2015 than in 2014. The downward trend leveled out in 2016 and rebounded somewhat in Sheppard Bay as shown in Fig. 2. The Council would like to take credit for the unexplained decrease in EWM but, in fact, other than the lake level rising over three feet since January 2013 we have no answer to why EWM has virtually disappeared, only that it has.



Significant drops in EWM densities have been documented for inland lakes, only to have it return as aggressive, dense growth 5-10 years later. Therefore, while we might have a break from the heartburn caused to recreation and to our water ecology during the recent past, we can fully expect EWM to return.

The goal of our ongoing EWM studies is the same as stated in 2012. It is to ensure that a safe, non-chemical EWM management material is available when the Islands again become invaded by EWM. To date, the best alternative towards a safe, effective treatment for EWM is use of a native fungus which has shown an exceptional ability to infect and destroy EWM plants while leaving native plants uninfected and in a healthy state. The Council is also working with researchers from Michigan Tech to devise more efficient methods for detecting EWM.

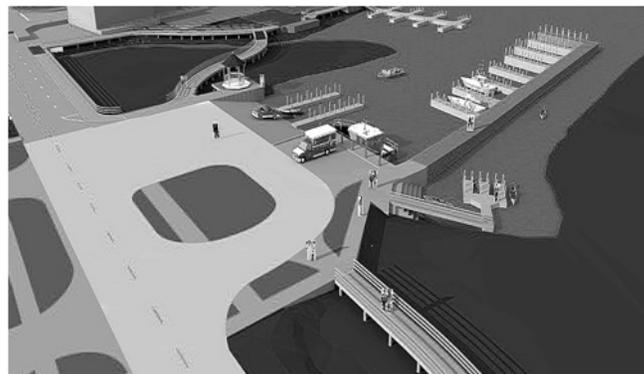
## Cedarville Harbor Upgrade will soon be underway....

That was the expectation last year at this time... What has changed is that, thanks to Supervisor Gary Reid, Clark Township qualified for, and was awarded, a better grant opportunity. Rather than requiring a local 50% match, Gary was able to have the Township qualify for a 25% local financial match grant. Grants were awarded at the end of 2016, thus the delay in beginning fund raising and beginning the project.

Clark Township has cashed in their pop cans and has committed to contributing \$140,000 towards the project. Additionally, thirty thousand dollars has been contributed so that engineering drawings can be developed. From those drawings a final cost will be known and contracts for construction can be solicited. Each of three organizations contributed \$10,000 each to the engineering costs: Lions Club, Islands Association and the Watershed Council.

The Community Foundation has agreed to serve as fiduciary agent for collection and distribution of local match funds.

Progress and updates will be posted on the Clark Township website at [www.clarktwp.org](http://www.clarktwp.org)



*Rendering of new piers and launch ramp. A harbor house will be located on the west side of the Meridian*

## Little Brown Bats

Next summer the Watershed Council will conduct an informal survey to learn about our local population of Little Brown Bats. As most of you are probably aware, our bat population has dropped quickly during the past few years due, in most cases, to a lethal fungal disease known as "white nose syndrome". Please note, unless you are a Little Brown Bat do not worry about the bat fungus affecting you!

A brief survey of local and seasonal residents last summer indicated that while our LCI Little Brown Bat numbers have dropped significantly there are still sightings which, in some cases, have seen numbers rising during the past couple years.

These flying insect traps are highly beneficial and with their numbers dropping we suffer many more mosquito and blackfly bites. They are also an important part our ecology. University researchers at Western Michigan and Eastern Michigan as well as MIDNR have been studying the decline of Little Brown Bats throughout MI. The purpose of next summer's survey will be estimate the size of our bat population and then to learn what, if anything, can be done to help bring our local bats to a robust population level.

Although you probably haven't needed those bedroom tennis rackets the past few years, you might keep them around for a time when the bats are once again zipping through the cottage bedroom!

For more information on the Little Brown Bat fungal pathogen see: [whitenosesyndrome.org](http://whitenosesyndrome.org)

The Watershed Council website will also have a Bat Page by early summer.

Little Brown Bat Factoids:

--Latin name: *Myotis lucifigus*

--3" to 5" long and 1/16<sup>th</sup> to 1/2 ounce weight.

--Bats from Les Cheneaux winter in Keweenaw caves and mine shafts rather than the caves of Kentucky

--There is fossil evidence for bats more than 50 million years ago.

### LCIA Board of Directors Meeting Dates for 2017

Wednesday, May 31, 9:00 a.m.

Thursday, July 6, 9:00 a.m.

Friday, September 1, 9:00 a.m.

Conference Room - Cedar Cove Assisted Living

### Annual Meeting

Thursday, August 10, 4:00 p.m.

Commons Room, Les Cheneaux Community School

### Annual Dinner

Thursday, August 10, 5:30 p.m., Clark Township Community Center