

Three Lakes Association  
Annual Meeting August 22, 2013  
President's Message

Well, I have good news and bad news, and overlapping news. That's just the way things work out in reality. It took me several years to reach the understanding that burdens and blessings are always mixed together - one does not come without the other.

I might just as well get the bad news out of the way first. We have had to say good-bye to two very special people in TLA, so far this year. We lost Jack Norris on April 3, some four years after he was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma of the right lung, and his doctors estimated he might have a half-year to live. We lost Mark Knight very recently, on August 12, also after a valiant, life-affirming struggle with cancer. Both men served the mission of TLA to the best of their ability, whether for forty years or half a dozen, the gifts they made of their time, talent, and commitment were, and continue to be, precious to the life of this organization.

We learned early this year that a lifelong dedication to the mission and purposes of TLA can continue even after life ends, as final gifts of \$30,000 each, were made to the Three Lakes Association and to the Grass River Natural Area, in honor and loving memory of Bob and Carol Hildorf.

We also learned again that people really do support the causes they believe in. TLA's Science Education Outreach Program has made grants, over the last five years, to assist science teachers in our four school districts to carry on with projects that otherwise might perish for lack of funding. We realize that the way to teach environmental stewardship is to begin with the children; providing them with a solid, science-based understanding of their relationship to the natural world. The value of this special outreach program inspired Gordy Shafer, of the Dockside, to step forward with a challenge matching grant of \$3,000 per year for three years. The last time I checked, we had already received something over \$2,000 in matching gifts or pledges.

TLA's foundational programs and activities continue, season after season, as dedicated volunteers sample the water quality of our lakes, our rivers, and the streams that feed them. You may see volunteers in the streams with D-nets, scooping up samples to take back to their workspace, where they will pick out, identify, and count, the various insects that inhabit the stream. Inventorying the macroinvertebrate population of the stream is an excellent means of monitoring the health of the stream. You may see volunteers out on the lakes, measuring the clarity of the water and securing samples for laboratory analysis of such things as Phosphorus, dissolved Oxygen, and phytoplankton content. You may see adult volunteers working with our high school interns as these young people learn about the science of water quality, or investigate the presence of aquatic plant life along the shore. You may see volunteers participating in the summer adult-educational events held jointly with Grass River Natural Area, Torch Lake Protection Alliance, and Friends of Clam Lake - setting up the venue, introducing the speakers, giving a presentation, distributing literature, welcoming attendees, or any other task that is needed. And, behind the scenes are many volunteers that you never see.

TLA's ability to function rests squarely on the shoulders of our volunteers. We are, fundamentally, a grassroots volunteer environmental stewardship organization, focused on the health of the waters of our lakes and their connecting waterways and tributaries, with a hard-working Board of Directors. One of the lessons we are learning is that we need to reach out more to our membership with volunteer opportunities. Watch for volunteer opportunities to be published in our newsletter and posted on our website and announced on our Facebook page. If we want to expand our programs, we will need more volunteers - we can't continue to have the same two-dozen people striving to do everything.

In the past few years, we have engaged in expanding programs. We are part of the fish shelter project, a wonderfully successful collaboration of seven environmental organizations, members of the Elk River Chain of Lakes - Watershed Plan Implementation Team, including: Friends of Clam Lake, Intermediate Lake Association, Elk-Skegemog Lakes Association, Three Lakes Association, Antrim Conservation District, The Watershed Center - Grand Traverse Bay, and Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council. The purpose of this project is to improve fish habitat - and fishing, of course! - in Lakes Bellaire, Clam, Elk, Intermediate, and Torch.

We have also lent our voice to watershed-wide concerns, such as the cement kiln dust leachate problem that threatened the waters of Lake Michigan and our region's aquifers; the TCE plume flowing underground from Mancelona northwestward toward the Cedar River, contaminating the drinking water wells of the area; the growing threat to our environment of invasive species, both aquatic and terrestrial; the future of the hydro-electric dam at Elk Rapids; the region-wide concerns over deep-well slick-water hydraulic fracturing regulations; and the need to address low water levels in the Great Lakes.

Locally, TLA has taken part in such fun community events as the Short's to Short's paddling event, the Petoskey Stone Fair, the Antrim County Fair, and many others.

So, my good-news-bad-news message boils down, ultimately, to this: there's a lot to do out there - good, important stuff that fits well into our mission, which, just in case you haven't read it lately, is: *to 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.*

That's the good news! The bad news is that we have pretty well stretched the limits of what the same two-dozen people can shoulder. Add to that the fact that nobody lives forever, and our dilemma becomes crystal clear.

Friends, we need you. As you review the programs of TLA, as you peruse the reports and stories in our newsletter, as you enjoy and share the photos and comments on our Facebook page - when you come across a cause or program that resonates with your interests, please step forward and offer your help. We can certainly find a place for you on our team, and a task that I am confident will turn out to be surprisingly rewarding.