

Bear Lake milfoil problem solved by Lake Improvement Board

By DAVE YARNELL
STAFF WRITER

It's not exactly "the government," but it is a public body and since August 2007 it has been "here to help."

And the Bear Lake Lake Improvement Board has helped, by almost miraculously ridding the lake of the invasive species it had set out to eliminate — the plant Eurasian water milfoil.

The miracle came in the form of the big storm that hit the area in June 2008 and spread the chemical 2, 4-D around enough to nearly eliminate the weed entirely.

"I refer to it as good news, bad news thing," said Don Brisbin, chairperson of the lake improvement board.

He adds that many had hoped that milfoil weevils could be used to control the weed without the use of chemicals,

and when it was decided that the chemical would have to be used, the plan was to eventually move to where the weevils would completely control the plant.

In 2008 some 260 acres were treated with the chemical 2, 4-D just before the storm, leaving about 70 acres of milfoil for the weevils. The good news is that almost all the milfoil was eliminated, but the bad news was that the weevils have also perished along with their food supply.

This summer only three acres were treated, and just 11 acres were treated in 2009.

"We didn't want to use the chemicals if we didn't have to," said board member Carver Edwards.

Others currently on the board in addition to Brisbin and Edwards are

See **BEAR LAKE** page 5A



Dave Yarnell/News Advocate Don Brisbin (right) is the chairperson of the Bear Lake Lake Improvement Board, Jack Sawka (center) is the former chair of the board, and Carver Edwards (left) is a current member of the board.

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INDEX

Local/State 3A

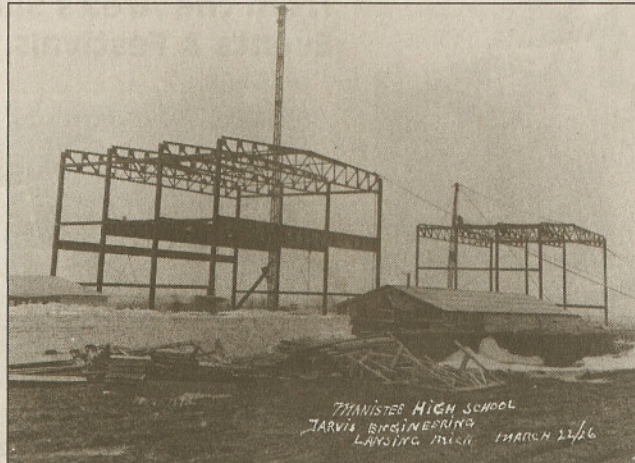
Opinion 4A

Chamber News 5A

MarketPlace 5B

Coffee Break 4B

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Coming Friday

Friday's Museum Page will feature the construction of Manistee High School

LOTTERY

Midday Daily 3

2-2-6

Midday Daily 4

1-6-1-1

Daily 3

2-9-9

Daily 4

9-6-0-9

Fantasy 5

19-22-24-27-37

Keno

3-8-9-10-11-16-21-22-23-26-

34-38-42-48-49-50-57-59-

63-71-73-74.

Wednesday's Classic

Lotto 47 jackpot is estimat-

ed at \$1.4 million; **Friday's**

Mega Millions jackpot is

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OBITUARIES

Ruth Theresa Dean

Patricia J. Finner

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See Page 6A

QUOTE

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Brian Harris, who represents Pleasanton Township; Bob Yates, Bear Lake Township; Ken Hilliard, liaison to the Manistee County Board of Commissioners; and Mark Dibenedetto, Manistee County drain commissioner. Edwards represents the Village of Bear Lake and Brisbin is a riparian elected member.

Jack Sawka was the first chairperson of the board.

"Jack was very instrumental in getting this thing going," Brisbin said. "I think all of the board members would agree that we wouldn't be as far as we are today if it weren't for Mr. Sawka. Even though Jack isn't on the board today, he's a wealth of information."

It was when it became obvious that the weevils weren't going to get the job done that citizens began the process of creating the lake improvement board to raise money for more expensive chemical treatments.

"It all started when the property owners had a speaker, Tom Rozich of the DNR, come in to talk about fishing on the lake," Sawka said. "He had taken a tour of the lake and he saw all of the milfoil and knew how bad it was, so at the meeting he stopped four or five times and said, 'everybody in this room, you need to know, you have Eurasian water milfoil and you need to fix it.' Throughout the meeting he kept saying that, over and over and over again.

"After he said that, there were many people around that room who said we've got to do something, but we really didn't know what to do," Sawka continued. "So the property owners association put together a committee of a number of groups, and they called it the Community Council for the Control of Milfoil - CCCM."

That was in September 2006, and Sawka said that the first thing the group decided was that it needed to raise money to have a study done so it would know exactly how big the problem was.

"And since we had a little bit of money left, we were able to put the weevils in the water through the CCCM," Sawka said.

Some 5,000 of the bugs that are about the size of a pinhead were put into the lake, at a cost of a little over \$1 each.

"We intended to supply more weevils after the first chemical treatment," Brisbin said. "We all were dead set against the chemicals. I'm still a little disappointed that we can only treat it with chemicals, but you have to understand why. We just don't have enough milfoil to support the weevils."

By the summer of 2007 the group decided to start moving toward establishing a lake

improvement board, and to do that it needed a lawyer to walk them through the process.

"The last township approval came in early August of 2007," Sawka said. "We met then and decided we needed to act quickly. Two options were to borrow the money to treat it in 2008, or wait until 2009. We decided that it would be less expensive in the long run to borrow the money and treat the problem right away."

The first lake board assessment was \$667 per riparian owner - enough to pay back the loan for the first treatment from the Manistee County Revolving Fund and then treat the lake the following year. Since the milfoil problem is almost completely solved, assessments since then have been about \$50 each year.

"The law provides that lake improvement boards can deal with a variety of issues, but when ours was created it was limited in the resolutions adopted by the townships and the village to deal with non-native invasive species," Sawka said. "It's a self limitation."

"It's a limited scope, what we do, but it's still broad enough to take care of problems," Brisbin said.

The board members added that they can in the future, if necessary, deal with other invasive plant species, or even fish species, such as Asian carp or red goby.

All of the studies of Bear Lake have been completed by lake scientist Jennifer Jermalowicz-Jones of the Grand Haven-based firm Lakeshore Environmental Inc.

"She's very, very busy and she's very good - she knows her weeds and she's just a wealth of information," Brisbin said.

"The study is the single biggest reason we've been successful," Sawka said. "If you don't know what you have and you don't know where it is and how much you have of it, it's awfully hard to determine what you have to do."

Edwards noted that Jermalowicz-Jones has mapped out a grid matrix of the lake. "She can tell you what's growing in any part of the lake," he said.

Sawka said that lake studies are completed in the spring to determine what treatments are needed and then another in the fall to determine how well the treatments worked.

"I think for the most part everyone around the lake is very, very happy with how things have gone," Brisbin said. "I've heard from people at another lake in northern Michigan where the factions are fighting trying to figure out how to take care of the problem, and in the meantime they are losing their lake. Their property values are down 20 percent because of the weeds."

PFLAG Manistee to

PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Manistee's regular September monthly meeting to be held at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 19 at Holy Trinity Church, 410 Second St., Manistee, will feature Pat Horton and Brian Baker from the Michigan Fairness Forum as guest speakers.

Horton and Baker will talk to the local group about the mission of the Michigan Fairness Forum and how it could work toward having a positive impact on the Manistee community's perspective on the LGBT persons and

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