

Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership (MSIP) Notes from 6/22/16 Meeting in Roscommon

President Holly Gedert and Environmental Liaison John Kafer attended this meeting to represent the DLIA. The morning sessions began with the experience of the lake associations sponsoring the meeting (Crystal, Glen, Higgins, Leelanau, and Lime), followed by sharing of the other dozen (or so) lakes attending the meeting. There are a number of lakes taking a far more aggressive approach to the issue than DLIA.

A working lunch conveyed that \$250,000 is expected to be earmarked in the 2017 DNR budget in support of solutions, as it has emerged as an issue that has gotten "under the skin" of the Pure Michigan campaign. Separately, a study of the economic impact of Swimmer's Itch (SI) on tourism and real estate should be conducted. At an organizational level MSIP is not 501(c)(3) and is in discussions with the Leelanau Center for Education as a potential parent umbrella for MSIP.

The afternoon session began with Dr. Curt Blankespoor interviewing his father Dr. Harvey Blankespoor about his lifelong research of SI, and it was fascinating to learn the involvement of Douglas Lake over the years, beginning with the first identification of this type of dermatitis in 1928!

A panel discussion followed with several experts of national note. Ron Reimink and Dr. Curt Blankespoor report promising initial results on Higgins Lake through their SICON LLC. Dr. Patrick Hanington from Alberta has developed a method using DNA tagging to identify the presence and severity of the SI worms within one hour, allowing the possibility of knowing when and where not to swim! Dr. Sam Loker from the University of New Mexico reported on his international experience with SI's big sister Schistosomiasis -- the most devastating parasitic infection worldwide, with a very similar parasitic life cycle to SI. Dr. Tom Raffel from Oakland University presented his research to understand variations in the worm populations through the day as temperatures change, and attempts to correlate other factors favoring the production and shedding of the worms by the snails. Dr. Rex Lowe of Bowling Green State University explained how diatoms and other algae fit into the life cycle of SI, particularly as snail food. Anna Dick represented RTI, a company interested in developing a repellent for SI.

Regarding preventatives, Swimmer's Itch Guard has been reformulated using 20% Eucalyptus Oil as the active ingredient. Sawyer Premium Ultra 30 uses 30% Deet encapsulated in liposomes (FDA approved in 2012 for delivery of pharmaceuticals) that release over 11 hours. Dr. Raffel recommends this product and supplies it to his water researchers.

Overall, there is progress being made on mitigating SI. DLIA is staying informed and has taken a relatively passive stance in recent years on what is probably the most negative thing about our beloved lake. It is likely MSIP will find its legs and there will be further practical solutions for reducing, but never eliminating, Swimmer's Itch. We should watch these developments closely, and participate as it makes sense.

- Submitted by John Kafer, June 25, 2016