

To: Holly Gedert, President, Douglas Lake Improvement Association
From: Ronald E. Witthoff

Re: Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership Conference (9-18-17)

I attended the Michigan Swimmer's Itch Partnership (MISIP) Conference, which was conducted in Traverse City at the Haggerty Center of Northwestern Michigan College. The conference was very informative and professional and hosted presenters who described MISIP's goals, activities and future plans. Also, several "scientific" presenters described their research and preventative programs on certain lakes to control swimmer's itch. My overall impression of the Conference was very positive, and I will summarize the information and highlights so the DLIA can utilize the resources available through MISIP for the benefit of Douglas Lake.

1. ABOUT MISIP

This organization was formed in 2014 as a result of significant swimmer's itch problems in several northern Michigan recreational lakes including Higgins, Crystal (near Frankfort), Glen, North and South Lake Leelanau. The partnership has a good website (MISIP.org) which describes its objectives and accomplishments quite well. The website is informative, well worth examining and describes MISIP much better than I could in this memo. My impression from the individuals at the conference was that MISIP is very committed to this problem and are heavily reliant on science based information.

2. HIGGINS LAKE EXPERIENCE

Higgins Lake developed a significant swimmer's itch problem several years ago which resulted in numerous complaints of swimmer's itch—many in children—and caused residents to avoid swimming and using the Lake. Apparently, property values were being affected, and people were demanding action. MISIP was created to some extent as a result of this situation. Scientific experts were utilized to evaluate the situation, and it was determined that the waterfowl species of "common merganser" was a part of the life cycle of the parasite causing swimmer's itch. It was decided that if this "life cycle" could be broken, the swimmer's itch problem could be significantly abated. A program was implemented to capture and relocate the mergansers over the past 3 years that has resulted in a 90% reduction in the incidence of swimmer's itch on Higgins Lake. The "life cycle" was broken and quite an impressive success story resulted.

3. COMMON MERGANSER REMOVAL PROGRAM

The waterfowl "common merganser" has been identified as the duck species that is very often the culprit as the host species in the life cycle of the parasite, which causes swimmer's itch. The scientists presenting at the Conference acknowledged that other waterfowl could be host species (such as mallards and geese), but this was unusual. By far, the common

mergansers seem to be the problem and removal from the lake seems to be a solution to the problem. The process described was that after the merganser ducklings hatched, the brood would be trapped in a humane and nonlethal manner (netting), and the birds would be relocated to a predetermined area, which was suitable for bird survival and in a state land area not utilized by swimmers or other recreational users (marshes and bogs). The State was involved with this program, and the bird survival rate was extremely high. All involved seemed sensitive to the survival issue and selecting relocation areas that were suitable—not just transferring the problem to “somebody else’s back yard.”

4. MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES INVOLVEMENT

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) has been involved with the above referenced (merganser) relocation project. The MDNR has now developed an official policy, which will be unveiled by the end of September 2017, per Barbara Avers, Waterfowl and Wetlands Specialist—MDNR. This policy will require State permitting with respect to common merganser control. It appears lakes, which desire to engage in this method of swimmer’s itch control will have to show:

- A demonstrable swimmer’s itch problem (probably thru surveys and records of swimmers itch complaints)
- A scientific determination that removing and relocating common mergansers will address the swimmer’s itch problem in your lake.

DLIA would likely necessarily be the applicant for such permit if and when it were decided such action was prudent for our lake.

5. LOTIONS TO PREVENT SWIMMER’S ITCH

Wayne Swallow of SI Solutions LLC presented information on a cream or lotion he is developing to prevent swimmer’s itch. The product is in the nature of sunscreen with certain additives (essential oils and other ingredients) that has proved successful. This product seems preliminary at this stage of its development but should be considered as a possible solution.

6. SUMMARY

DLIA may want to create a program to ascertain the level of swimmer’s itch our lake experiences. Some sort of reporting process of infections may be necessary if DLIA decided a more proactive approach to swimmer’s itch control was needed. Also, becoming a member lake in “MISIP” could be considered so as to support their work and receive, first hand, the results of the research they conduct.

My impression was they were a dedicated, professional and scientifically based organization. They have received state funding of \$250,000 utilizing a lobbyist to assist in devising control efforts and to support research on the swimmer’s itch problem.