ILA Bulletin

INTERMEDIATE LAKE ASSOCIATION

September 2025

2025 ILA Annual Meeting

On Saturday, August 9th, ILA members gathered at the Torch Lake Café in Eastport for the 19th ILA Annual Meeting. During the meeting directors were elected to the ILA Board and we welcomed Greg Bellopatrict as our newest Director. Our guest speaker for the meeting was Leslie Meyers, Antrim County Operator of Dams, who presented an update on the important work to improve the Bellaire Dam, other key improvements needed along our Chain of Lakes and how all this work will be funded. As always, plentiful and delicious complimentary hor-d'oeuvres were served for those in attendance.

Your current ILA Board of Directors are:

David Christian, President
John Bridenbaugh, Treasurer
Stan Yoder, Secretary
Greg Bellopatrick
Mandy Bush
Matt Gabris
Andy Hickman
Aaron Phelps

If you ever have any questions, comments or concerns, please reach out to the Board (via the ILA email as listed at the bottom of this newsletter) – we always welcome your input. Also note that the ILA By-laws, plus lots of other useful information can be found on the ILA website.

Here are three pictures from the event.

ILA Annual 2025 Membership Drive

It's that time of year when the ILA contacts all riparian owners on Intermediate Lake, Hanley Lake and the Intermediate River (north of the Bellaire Dam) **who are not** currently members of the ILA. Our membership represents over 40% of the waterfront owners so we have room for more. We do welcome members from anywhere - if you know someone who enjoys our waterways and area please let them know about us.

Click here to become a new member.

Click here to renew your current membership.

Dues are $25 per membership for one year or $100 for five years.

Mandy Bush, Membership Chair

PR Assistance Needed for Extended Lake Level Committee

The Lake Level Committee needs a volunteer with expertise in Public Relations and Communications. The expanded volunteer committee, established by Leslie Meyers, our Antrim County Operator of Dams and Drain Commissioner, has been working hard to make sure we have had good interactions between members of the community and the engineering firms working on projects regarding the county's dams and related infrastructure. We currently have volunteers with scientific backgrounds, hydrology, especially dam engineering, and even legal expertise in establishing and managing drain districts. However, we are getting to a stage in these complex, interrelated projects, where we need to establish broad-based community-wide outreach to help ensure that all our county residents understand the need for this important work and how it impacts them. We are excited to have recently added a volunteer with expertise in setting up websites to the team. If you are interested in helping with this project, please contact Leslie Meyers at: meyersl@antrimcountymi.gov or 231-533-3633.

ILA 5 Year Plan Volunteers Needed

Your ILA Board of Directors is looking for a few volunteers who would be interested in helping formulate a **5 Year Plan** for the organization. This sub-committee (reporting to the ILA Board) will include inviting our membership to provide input into areas for us to focus and address and then creating a strategic vision for the next 5 years for our association. If you are interested in Chairing this committee or participating in it, please let me know. We anticipate getting starting with this during the fall and winter months. Volunteer!!

Dave Christian, President - ILA

Intermediate Lake Fish Stocking Update

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regularly stocks the Elk River Chain of Lakes with fish. While this information is easily available on the DNR website, here is an update on the last few years' fish stocking information for Intermediate Lake:

May 30, 2018: 66,475 walleye were planted (1.42 inch average size)
November 9 & 10, 2021: 2,339 walleye were planted (7.5 inch average size)
June 22, 2022: 64,735 walleye were planted (1.5 inch average size)
June 28, 2023: 50,866 walleye were planted (1.75 inch average size)
June 3, 2025: 75,940 walleye were planted (1.11 inch average size)

Fish planting is also done on Bellaire (walleye, muskie), Six Mile (walleye), Torch (Atlantic salmon), and Elk (rainbow trout). See the DNR database for details.

Block The Flock

The following article is courtesy of our friends at the Tip Of The Mitt Watershed Council from their August, 2025 Ripple Report e-newsletter.

If your lakefront lawn looks like a goose parade route, you're not alone. Many Michigan lakes are home to large populations of Canada geese, especially in places where mowed lawns stretch right down to the water's edge. While these birds might seem like a quaint part of lakeside life, their presence, particularly in large numbers, can pose serious challenges to water quality and human health.

Canada geese are drawn to shorelines where lawns are mowed directly to the water's edge. These open, manicured spaces provide ideal habitat: geese have easy access to the water and an unobstructed view to spot potential predators. Unfortunately, these same conditions contribute to lake health issues.

Each goose can produce up to a pound of droppings per day, and those droppings are packed with nutrients like phosphorus. According to The Michigan Riparian (Spring 2018), in an article by Dr. Jennifer Jermalowicz-Jones and Jordan Bentley, just 20 geese spending a year near a beach can contribute as much phosphorus as 100 pounds of lawn fertilizer, fueling the growth of tens of thousands of pounds of algae. These blooms are more than just unsightly: they can deplete oxygen, harm fish and aquatic life, and even pose health risks to humans. Goose waste can also carry harmful bacteria and pathogens that compromise the safety of swimming areas.

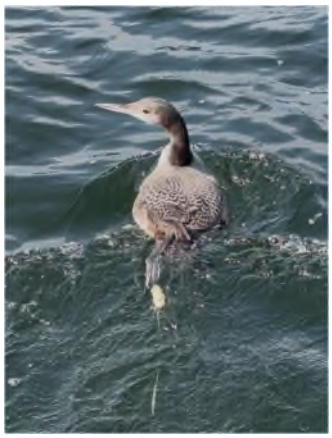
One of the most effective and attractive ways to discourage geese and improve lake health is by replacing a grass lawn with a strip of native vegetation called a greenbelt. Tall native grasses, sedges, wildflowers, and shrubs create a natural buffer that blocks the easy access geese prefer while also slowing runoff and filtering pollutants before they reach the water.

For further reading, see these two informational links:

The Impacts of the Canada Goose
Greenbelts

A Challenge for our Loon Platoon!

Things have been going along nicely for our five loon families…all six young loons have developed normally, are nearly as big as the adults and increasingly fending for themselves.



Then, early on September 2, we got word from a fisherman that a young loon had gotten hooked on his lure. That afternoon, Dick West and Andy Hickman, our Loon Platoon Captains, spotted the loon, got very close to it and confirmed that the lure was stuck in the upper left leg or wing…possibly both. The DNR and other known resources were contacted for assistance. Unfortunately, no outside help was to be forthcoming. We were pretty much on our own. At the same time the weather turned bad and for several days it was not possible to be out checking on the injured loon. We were not even sure which of our young loons the injured one was so we didn't know where to look for it.

On September 9, we put the word out about the injured loon and asked that anyone spotting it let us know its location. That afternoon Dick and Andy loaded some equipment on Andy's pontoon boat and went out to look for it…not knowing where to look or what to expect to see…and not at all anxious to try and capture an injured loon. After a lengthy search, the loon was spotted in the north part of the lake. It appeared very calm so they decided to try to capture it in a large net. That effort resulted in making the bird run across the water flapping its wings trying to get away, which did partially dislodge the lure, leaving it only attached to the webbing on the loon's left foot (see picture).

September 11. Based on that experience, I was not comfortable trying to capture our injured loon and removing the fishing lure on our own. But after a couple of informative and supportive conversations with our loon expert in the U.P. my confidence grew. We have been in touch with Damon McCormick of Common Coast regarding loon questions for many years. Common Coast did a major study of the loons in the Antrim County Chain of Lakes several years ago which involved many trips to our lake to band the loons for tracking their migratory movements and record which loons returned to this area. He convinced me that handling a juvenile loon is much less of a project than handling an adult loon. I had sent Damon a video of the loon "running" away from us that he found especially disturbing. That loon should have dived to get away. If it wasn't diving it wasn't eating and would starve. We needed to do something soon….and the weather forecast was favorable…

So we would need to capture it on our own – so Damon helped us with some invaluable advice on how to go about capturing the loon and safely handling it…safely for the loon and for us humans. He also provided a series of loon call recordings to assist in the capture. He indicated we should have three people in the boat, diplomatically suggesting a younger person as the third person might be an advantage. Luckily, my neighbor, 19 year old Dean Lewis, happened to be here for one night. What a great crew member he turned out to be!

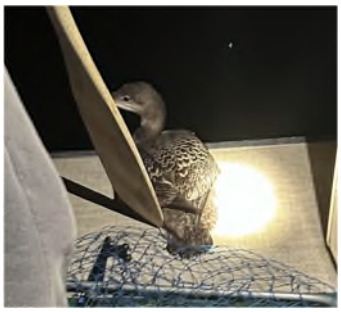
During the day we received reports that the injured loon was staying in one small cove across the lake to the north of the sand bar. Those reports, one of them coming just an hour before we went out, were extremely helpful in our finding the right loon quickly.

Our motley three person crew left Andy's dock a little before 7:30pm. We immediately spotted the loon right where it had been most of the day…across the lake, about a quarter of a mile away from Andy's dock. Since it was so inactive we approached it slowly to see how close we could get. Not very close. So, we followed Damon's advice and kept an eye on it from a distance until after dark. There was no wind. We were able to just sit in practically one spot to watch the loon.

As it became too dark to see the loon without a spotlight, we moved in closer and started playing the loon calls. While it didn't come towards us like we hoped it would, it did stop to listen, moving slightly towards us but not significantly. We then moved slowly towards it, with Andy expertly maneuvering the boat, getting close enough for me to try and scoop it up from below with the net. I didn't catch it…and it ran across the water flapping its wings getting away from us. But it didn't go far. We let it settle down for a while before making another attempt.

Dean suggested trying to net it from above, which certainly made sense. For our next attempt we had Dean handle the net. And handle it well he did! As Andy again got us back close to the loon it moved rather quickly to the left but Dean made a masterful swoop with the net over its head and body and the loon was ours!! What a thrill it was to see that! Dean controlled the net perfectly and got the loon onto the boat safely.

Then the fun began. We had an unhappy loon tangled in a big net trying to flap its wings to get away from us with a big fishing lure stuck to its foot by strong stainless steel hooks and another set of hooks threatening to hook us humans. We quickly got a towel over the loon's head which calmed it down but the towel easily got shook off. Once we got the loon's wings held in place and it fully covered by a thick soft comforter it stopped struggling. We then maneuvered the foot and lure out from the cover and attempted to cut the hook with a pair of sidecutters. The steel was too tough. Luckily I had brought a pair of bolt cutters that quickly did the job. The loon was finally free from that lure!!

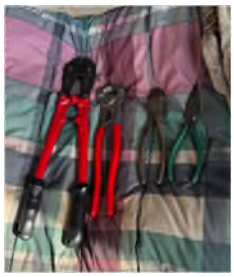


But we still had work to do. The second hook on the lure was all tangled up in the net and the loon was still in the net under the blanket. It took a frustrating few minutes to get that lure untangled. Then, as we removed the blanket, we saw the loon's head and neck were all the way through the webbing of the net. Not good. Dean took ahold of the loon's beak, and as I prepared to cut the net he was able to gently work the net off the neck and head. We didn't have to cut the net and the loon was really free!! I wish I had a video of Dean getting that net off because that was an exercise of patience and careful maneuvering with one hand, while gently holding the beak with his other hand. The loon was then able to shuffle around and scoot towards the edge of the boat…but it wouldn't take the plunge over the edge. I finally used a paddle to gently give it a push into the water. It popped up and swam quickly away…to our relief, clearly using both legs to push it along.

Mission accomplished!!

The loon swam a short distance…and then rose up to flap its wings…I'm sure that was a thank you wave to us for getting rid of that nasty lure. It swam a little further and stood up to flap again. I think that was a special wave to Dean for a job well done!!

At 9:15pm we made a call to Damon to inform him of our success. By 9:30pm we were back at Andy's dock…with lots of adrenaline pumping through our veins but no heart attacks, just a great story to put in the Loon Platoon's record book. These are the tools I took on the rescue mission. Andy had borrowed a huge salmon net from Captains Choice. Andy and Dean each brought very bright flashlights.



September 12. This morning, Andy saw a young loon in front of his place. He was able to identify it as "our loon" by the unusual white area near its left leg, and, at one point he saw it holding its left leg up out of the water for several seconds which is also unusual. That foot is probably a bit sore. More importantly, the loon was diving successfully and able to stay under water for long periods and distances. It is eating again!! It has a couple of months to recover and be ready for its journey south. Let's hope it is successful in that.

The Loon Platoon Care & Rescue Squad!
Dick West & Andy Hickman, Captains
Dean Lewis, (Honorary) First Mate