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Base Lake



Strawberry Lake



Gallagher Lake



Whitewood Lake



Portage Lake



Zukey Lake

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The PBWOA and the CHAIN OF LAKES



Huron Chain
Photo Credit: Jack White, Photographer

PBWOA

Portage, Base & Whitewood Owners Association & Portage Lake Chain

PART 1

THE PURPOSE OF THE PBWOA

By Mark Teicher, PBWOA President

I am thrilled that the Portage, Base & Whitewood Owners Association (PBWOA) and the Portage Chain of Lakes is the featured front page story in this issue of *The Michigan Riparian*. First, thank you to Sharon Wagner, *The Michigan Riparian* and the ML&SA Team for asking the PBWOA to contribute to the magazine. Second, thank you to a very dedicated and involved PBWOA Board of Directors and everyone who has contributed an article, photographs, information and support and especially Jon Waitz who has been chairperson, writer wrangler and organizer for this effort.

The PBWOA is very lucky to have a wonderful all volunteer Board of Directors from five lakes in our chain of lakes and the Huron River. In addition, we have a volunteer Science Advisor who gives of his time and expertise, along with our "retired" board members who stay on as Directors Emeritus.

The Association continuously engages in numerous efforts to protect our chain of lakes - our waters, shores, lake flora and fauna, property values and recreational opportunities through things such as the establishment of a Special Assessment District, hosting speakers from DEQ, DNR and many of our local agencies and governmental officials, publishing and gathering, sharing and disseminating to our members important pertinent information and partnering with our local supporting businesses and working and communicating with local township and county governments. The PBWOA has been involved with CLMP lake monitoring, educating members about the effects of fertilizers, lake frontage improvements and naturalization, birding, fishing, boating safety, invasive animals, invasive plants, algae, an excellent website, local accessory building ordinances, zoning, legal issues and area history, along with social events such as our annual pizza party.

We hope you enjoy the story of PBWOA and the Portage Lake Chain.

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Overall Lakes Description & History

There are seven main lakes in the chain:
**Big Portage, Little Portage, Base (aka Baseline), Zukey, Strawberry,
Whitewood and Gallagher.**

(Continued from page 5)

Overview:

The Portage/Zukey chain of lakes is a watershed of the Huron River that spans two counties and four townships in Southeast Michigan. Its southeastern edge is about 15 miles northwest of Ann Arbor. There are seven main lakes in the chain: Big Portage, Little Portage, Base (aka Baseline), Zukey, Strawberry, Whitewood and Gallagher. Navigation between these lakes via no-wake portions of the Huron, which are lovely undeveloped stretches of the river lush with trees. While these undeveloped stretches are lush with vegetation and as peaceful as any spot in nature, one can only imagine how beautiful traveling the chain must have been back in 1877 when Eli Moore, a Pinckney resident, traveled the chain by row boat. He later wrote, "the change of scenery from lake to river and river to lake was beautiful beyond description to a lover of nature."¹

Though not traditionally included in the list of chain lakes, Loon Lake is also connected and is a popular spot for deep lake swimming. Two other lakes, Tamarack and Ore, are connected but are only accessible from the chain by small watercraft. Ore Lake, in particular, is difficult to reach, as it is quite a journey up the river and the waterway is quite shallow in spots.



Huron Chain

Photo Credit: Jack White, Photographer

The largest lake on the chain is Big Portage Lake, which is 680 acres and 84 feet deep at its deepest point. It is known to be a good fishing lake, and is a very popular spot for sailing. The entire chain of lakes is very popular with recreationists, who flock to the area on summer weekends to boat, fish, waterski, tube, and just hang out with family and friends at one of several sand bars.

All of the lakes in the chain are known to be good for fishing. While there are over 90 species of fish found here, some of those regularly caught include Bluegill, Pike, Bass, Perch and Walleye. Many lovely birds also flock to the water, including Great Blue Herons, Sandhill Cranes, Ospreys, Canada Geese and swans. Bald Eagles can also be seen; in fact, there is a Bald Eagle that nests between Whitewood and Gallagher Lakes that is regularly spotted swooping down to snatch fish out of the water.

There is only one public marina offering gas to boats on the chain (Klave's Marina), but there are a number of dining options accessible from the water. At the top of the chain, Zukey Lake Tavern is a popular spot for boaters to stop and get a bite to eat. Many residents and visitors travel up the chain to the huge sand bar on Zukey Lake, and then dine

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Interlake boat regatta at Portage Yacht Club

Photo Credit: Jack White, Photographer



Above and Middle Picture: Lakeland Train Depot
 Picture below: Lakeland Pavilion



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on the roof top at the Tavern or pick up a pizza at the dock to eat on the boat. Further down the chain, pizza can also be picked up at Riverside Pizza on the canal between Baseline and Portage, while the Portage Yacht Club on the south end of Big Portage offers finer fare as well as a beach area for members and mooring slips.

Given the chain's size and all it has to offer, the shoreline has been heavily developed, and there are few buildable lots left. While there are still many old summer cottages lining the shores, there are also many big new homes. The best properties on the chain tend to sell immediately, and chain of lakes homes garner much higher prices than houses on nearby lakes off the chain.



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Overall Lakes Description & History

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History:

The birth of the Portage chain of lakes can be traced back 14,000 years to the last glacial retreat. The lakes in the chain are glacial kettle lakes, which formed when large blocks of ice split off from the retreating glacier and melted.²

Evidence of human inhabitation along the river can be traced back some 10,000 years. Both the Wyandot (later called Hurons by the French) and the Potawatomi established villages along the Huron River.³ Prior to the arrival of European explorers, the area was inhabited by a number of Native American tribes, such as the Mohawk, Chippewa and Fox. When European fur traders arrived, the Iroquois drove these other tribes out in an effort to monopolize the fur trade with the French. Famous explorer Robert Cavalier, Sieur de LaSalle, was perhaps the first non-native to travel the Chain of Lakes, which he did in the spring of 1680. He chose this remote northerly route to try to avoid Iroquois war parties.⁴

By the 1720s, Europeans had begun to develop the area in earnest, and were building dams, saw mills and grain mills along the riverway.⁵ In the 1880s, two railroads came through the area. Prior to this time, transportation was by foot, horse and wagon along old Indian trails and a few narrow roads. The arrival of the railroads led to a boom in employment opportunities and development.

One very popular stop on the railroad was at the north shore of Zukey, at the top of the chain of lakes. Summer vacationers would disembark at Lakeland and then transport their suitcases and supplies to cottages around the chain via wagon, canoe, row boat or steam boat. Prior to refrigeration, this railway stop was also a prime source of ice for other communities: ice was cut from Zukey Lake and transported via rail to Ann Arbor, Detroit, Pontiac and Toledo. The old Grand Trunk Railroad line has recently been put to great use as the Lakelands Trail, which is part of the Rails-to-Trails project, which will link Lake Michigan to Lake Huron via beautiful trails perfect for walking and bicycling. The Lakeland Trail is a very popular feature in the area; every day, local residents can be seen getting in some fresh air and exercise on this lovely nature trail.⁶

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Riverside Launch



Steamboat on the lake



Steamboat up the Huron

The lakes in the chain are glacial kettle lakes, which formed when large blocks of ice split off from the retreating glacier and melted.

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Another major attraction in Lakeland is Zukey Lake Tavern, which opened when Prohibition ended in the 1930s. The original proprietors, the Girald brothers, would regularly take a motorboat up and down the chain to pick up customers and bring them back to the tavern. Zukey Lake Tavern is still a very popular dining spot on the chain of lakes, and many visitors still arrive by boat today.

Icon in the community and long-time resident, Tom Ehman, who owns the Portage Yacht Club, is a wealth of information regarding changes that have taken place over the years. He first visited the lakes in 1937 as a small child. He then bought a cottage in 1957, and became a year-round resident in 1962. He says that in 1937, all of the residences on the chain were seasonal, and they had an outhouse on the back porch or a few steps away from the house. He remembers that back in the day, you would put a sign in the window telling the ice man how much ice you wanted, and by 8 pm at night, the electricity was shut down. It was only after WWII when DTE bought up the company that had been generating power at a location on the east shore of Big Portage that electricity became available 24/7.

The invention of the automobile no doubt contributed a great deal to residential development around the chain of lakes, as many cottages were built in the 1920s and following years. Most of these were summer homes. After WWII, however, construction of I-94 and US-23 made living on the chain and commuting to nearby cities feasible, at which time many cottages were winterized or torn down and replaced by year-round residences.⁷

A major turning point in the development of the chain came in the late 1980s when a sewer system was put in. Prior to this point, all the houses on the chain had septic fields, many of which were failing. Because lake lots tend to be small, there was no place on these lots to relocate the septic fields. As a result of this, banks would not issue mortgages for these properties; they could only be sold on land contract. After much struggle, eventually cooperation between two counties, four townships, and countless residents was attained, and the great majority of the houses lining the shores of the chain were hooked up to a community sewer system. Today, the Portage chain of lakes is considered one of the nicest areas in Southeast Michigan to live on the water, given its natural beauty, cleanliness, proximity to Ann Arbor, and exceptional recreational opportunities.



The Portage, Base & Whitewood Owners Association

The lower end of the chain of lakes is blessed to have a very active owner's association, the Portage, Base & Whitewood Owners Association (PBWOA). Prior to this association coming into being, there were some other organizations that sprang up to address the various problems and issues that lake communities tend to experience.

One of the greatest achievements of the PBWOA was the development of the sewer system in 1989. The association was instrumental in this coming into being, as it circulated petitions throughout the community, and campaigned with local governing bodies to get a special assessment district created. Prior to the development of the sewer system, some residences were draining sewage directly into the lake, and many septic fields were failing, which was causing widespread contamination. The creation of the sewer system has naturally led to better water quality, and as mentioned previously, has fostered greater development as now banks will issue mortgages for chain of lakes properties.

Prior to the current association, the Portage and Base Lakes Association did tremendous service to residents of

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Overall Lakes Description & History

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the chain by campaigning for the construction of the John Fluke Dam. In 1946 and in 1957, the area experienced major flooding. MacGregor road was underwater, and all of the cottages on the east side of Big Portage had furniture floating in them. This of course also prevented the septic systems from functioning properly. It was a big problem.

Tom Ehman led the charge in researching the source of the problem and possible solutions. It was eventually determined that a dam was needed to control the water level. In the summer of 1963, a team of 11 men circulated petitions to form a special assessment district in order to dig out the river and build a dam. (Tom Ehman still has the box of signed petitions in storage!)



Fluke Dam

Plans were set in motion, and by April of 1966, the dam was operational. Ehman says the first year, they experienced their first disaster when mist froze the top of the dam, and then a thaw came with heavy rains in January. The dam was frozen but badly needed to be opened, so Ehman and the man who operated the dam took hammers, sledge hammers, torches, and everything they could think of to try to get it open. After three days of strenuous effort, they at last succeeded. After this, it was determined that the smart thing to do was to let the lake down three feet every November so that when heavy winter rains came, the lake would be able to accept the rain. To this day, the water level is lowered every fall, though it is no longer let down three full feet.

Currently the PBWOA is involved in some initiatives designed to improve the ecology of the chain. Foremost is the weed control project, which is designed to tackle the problem

of weed overgrowth and promote ecosystem stability. The goal is to control invasive and nuisance aquatic weeds through mechanical harvesting and chemical treatment. It is hoped this effort will enhance the recreational environment and make the chain more aesthetically pleasing.

The DNR is also making an effort to control the goose and swan populations in order to reduce waste pollution on land and in the water. Swans are also being culled because they have been aggressive to the point of being a serious problem.

Finally, the PBWOA has recently put together a committee designed to educate lake residents on how to promote better lake ecology. This effort has partially arisen in relationship to the weed control project, because a big contributor to the weed problem is run-off from fertilized yards.

There are some other best practices that the association is hoping to see put in place. They recommend that homeowners:

- **Don't burn leaves at the edges of lakes.**
- **Don't throw yard trimmings or leaves into the water.**
- **Don't feed waterfowl by the lake.**
- **Don't put chemicals like fertilizers on lakeside lawns.**
- **Do clean up after pets.**
- **Do create a green belt at the shoreline as a buffer between the yard and water.**
- **Do remove weeds and leaves from the lake.**

It is particularly important to make sure yards are clean of pet waste, chemicals, and anything else that could pollute the water just prior to big storms, when the run-off impact is greatly magnified. These may seem like small efforts, but experts say that if everyone consistently adopts these practices, the ecology of the chain would see significant improvements over time.

The Huron River is considered to be the cleanest urban river in Michigan.⁸ With the combined efforts of the PBWOA and chain of lakes residents, it should grow to be an even lovelier place to live and play in the future.

Sources

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Fishing the Chain

**We love our Portage Chain of Lakes.
It's ours to enjoy, improve, and protect**

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Whether it's participating in the numerous Bass fishing tournaments, simple bobber and worm fishing for pan fish or everything in between, the Portage Chain of Lakes offers good fishing for everyone. As I write this during early morning, already there are bass boats crisscrossing Portage Lake in search of the best locations. Among the most popular game fish are Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass, Northern Pike, Walleye, Sunfish, Bluegills, Rock Bass, and Crappie, all of which are certainly catchable, however Walleyes can be somewhat of a challenge.

Each lake and their connecting waters offer a variety of ecosystems. Some lakes are deep water structures, sand and gravel bottoms with sunken islands, providing plenty of drop-off contour where most fish feed, and some are very shallow with gradual contours and extensive vegetation growth with adjoining deep water canals. The variety is endless, and after fishing these waters for over 50 years I'm surprised year after year with yet a new fishing discovery, be it huge largemouth bass caught in a couple feet of water, or giant bluegills suspended just a few feet deep over thirty foot depths. There's always something new, something that "doesn't make sense" – but works. It's constantly interesting.

Being a popular chain with plenty of boat traffic, like most public lakes, choosing the right time of day is important. Avoiding the busiest times, usually weekends from noon to about dinner time is advised. Those who will get up early and start fishing about dawn, or heading out just before dark, have the best chance to catch fish. Plus, April, and May, September and October, are wonderful times to fish on the Chain, as fish are very active during these "off season" times. It's peaceful, cool, and it just takes a little bundling up to stay warm, but it's so worth it.

The Portage Chain is a type of fishery requiring a somewhat different approach than usual. This fishery breaks the rule about "being patient". To figure out how to catch fish on any given day requires, well, a rather impatient approach. Perhaps more than other lakes, changing locations, depths, lures, bait, time of day, etc. frequently is the best bet. Staying in one place, watching a bobber for hour and waiting for the fish to come to you rarely works (by the way is a sure way to discourage a young angler). We rarely stay in one place longer than five to ten minutes. There have been times



Huron Chain
Photo Credit: Jack White, Photographer

when we've tried many combinations of techniques, depths, and locations, only to abandon the entire lake and fish in the connecting river waters and had great success. This is Portage Chain fishing.

It's also important not to get caught up in the "magic lure" idea. There isn't one. Simplicity is best, and catching fish on the Portage Chain has far more to do with changing locations, depth, time of year and time of day rather than using the perfect lure. Experimentation and trying different approaches is the key to this fishery, and perhaps many others in this wonderful state.

We do use simple plastic lures such as worms, tubes, lizards, crayfish, and live bait often too. When we do we always use circle hooks for conservation purposes. The circle hook is a wonderful invention, and hooks fish in the corner of the mouth an amazing 97% of the time, allowing easy release of unharmed fish you do not intend to keep. Plus, they are safer, as they don't snag things and people nearly as often as the traditional "J" hooks do. Circle hooks are highly recommended in almost all fishing conditions for all lakes.

The time honored method of trolling can be effective too, but early or late in the year are advised times, as like

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many other freshwater lakes in our State the motorboats tend to chop up aquatic vegetation which floats on the surface making it difficult to keep the weeds from sliding down your line and tangling lures.

Ice fishing the Chain is fun and productive. For some reason, the bigger lakes go sort of dormant, are difficult to ice fish successfully, so we concentrate on the smaller lakes, bays, and canals to catch fish consistently. Interestingly, and even more importantly, the same rules apply as for spring, summer, and fall, that being the importance of moving frequently, trying different locations, depths, etc., and again especially if there are kids on the outing. Long gone should be the days of sitting on a bucket in one spot, freezing, not catching any fish.

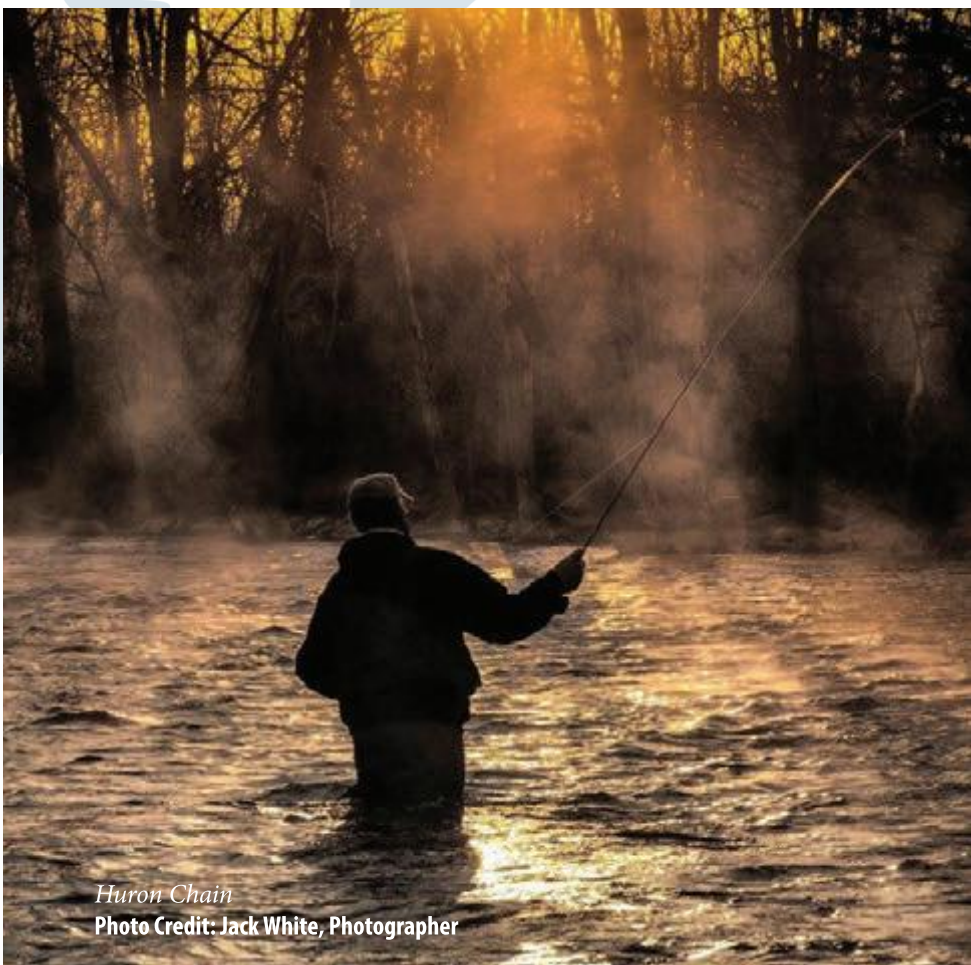
We often recommend individual conservation responsibility when fishing the Chain. Mostly, we release unharmed all Bass, Pike, and other top level predators, as they keep the fish population balanced and healthy. The State of Michigan's possession limits of 25 pan fish have been in place for generations, but it doesn't mean we have to keep that many. We suggest a self-imposed limit, that of keeping what you need for a good dinner as opposed to "limiting out", or "filling the freezer". We enjoy the honor and healthy fish populations from those before us who would say "leave some for someone else", and just took what they needed. It just makes sense to pass that on to our future friends, children, and grandchildren, doesn't it?

We love our Portage Chain of Lakes. It's ours to enjoy, improve, and protect. An essential part of fishing or any type of recreation on these waters has to include a consciousness of being a good steward as we enjoy this wonderful and fragile resource we are borrowing from future generations. We need to return it to them in great shape so they can enjoy it as well. There are simple things you can do

when fishing the Chain which will help. To prevent transporting destructive invasive species of weeds to and from the Chain, such as when launching or removing our boats from the water checking and making sure we don't have any weeds hanging from our boat, props, or trailers and clean out our live wells. Never dump our extra bait out in the lake. Check out the Michigan Lake and Stream Associations website for more.

There are so many other things to enjoy when fishing the Chain. It has been said that fishing is an excuse to get out into great places with great people. Well, it's true, and the Portage Chain is a great place: we'll leave the great people part up to you. While fishing the Chain, you will also notice your aerial fishing partners such as Bald Eagles and Osprey. During your navigation from lake to lake, it's not uncommon to see deer, turkeys, and an array of other wildlife, flowering trees and bushes, and a natural wild setting along the Huron River connecting waters, much of which is protected. After 50 years of very active living on this Chain of Lakes, this writer believes he's just getting started in discovering all it has to offer.

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Huron Chain
Photo Credit: Jack White, Photographer



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The Birds and Waterfowl of the Chain of Lakes

By Raburn Howland

The Chain of Lakes and its adjacent land provide a wonderful area for bird watching. The Huron River, with its many lakes and tributaries, neighboring woodlands and fields has one of the most diverse collections of habitats in this area of Michigan. It is a remarkable region that makes it a great place to visit and explore, especially with children who might get a chance to see some spectacular birds, up close and personal.

For bird watchers, an added bonus is that the Huron runs between two of the best birding sanctuaries that one could wish for, and they quite accessible. The first is Hudson Mills Metro Park on North Territorial Road just east of Dexter Pinckney Road. It has miles of walking and hiking trails and is often referred to as a “warbler trap” by local birders, given the number of these very colorful birds that can be seen in and around the park. Just recently a paved path was completed along the river from Hudson Mills to Dexter that provides many wonderful views of the river as well as the local wildlife including wandering flocks of wild turkeys, Sandhill Cranes, Turkey Vultures, and local raptors including Bald Eagles and Red Tail Hawks.

The second area is the large and heavily wooded Stinchfield Woods, a University of Michigan preserve just west of Hudson Mills along and north of North Territorial road. There are many trails, some of which can be challenging but worth the effort because it is a major nesting area for a variety local birds.

The Huron River with its many lakes, large and small, provides habitat for many waterfowl such as Mallards, Canada Geese, Wood Ducks, Great Blue Herons, and Kingfishers to name a few of the more common ones. They all can be easily seen from anything that one can find to float down the river in, including inner tubes! The current is gentle, the depth is quite shallow in most areas and the water is warm, most of the time.

During migration seasons in the early spring and late fall/early winter these waters are major stopping off places for a much greater variety of birds and waterfowl as they participate in one of truly special spectacles of our natural world. On Portage Lake and Baseline Lake there are often flocks of many hundreds of Canada Geese, and several dozen different varieties of ducks. They are often being

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White Heron

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Heron

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Hummingbird

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watched from the sky and shoreline by resident Bald Eagles looking for a meal. This especially true during freeze up when the open water on the lakes is greatly reduced concentrating the waterfowl into ever shrinking pools of water. In the depths of winter when everything freezes and some of the Mute Swans don't survive the cold they become food for the eagles, hawks and crows.

One of the later migrants is the Common Loon. One or two spend several days in May and November on Portage Lake. For me their haunting call is without equal. One of the things that make being on the Chain of Lakes so special.



Sandhill Cranes

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Eagle Banded



Pileated Woodpecker

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Birds identified on the chain:

By Paul & Zara Rivera

- Common Loon
- Horned Grebe
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Canada Goose
- Mute Swan
- Trumpeter Swan
- Gadwall
- Mallard
- Common Pintail
- Wood Duck
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Lesser Scaup
- Greater Scaup
- Black Scoter
- Common Goldeneye
- Barrow's Goldeneye
- Bufflehead
- Ruddy Duck
- Common Merganser
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Hooded Merganser
- American Coot
- Herring Gull
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Snowy Egret
- Black Crowned Night Heron
- American Bittern
- Sandhill Crane
- Killdeer
- American Woodcock
- Common Snipe
- Wild Turkey
- Ring-necked Pheasant
- Red-Tailed Hawk
- Bald Eagle
- Osprey
- Turkey Vulture
- Mourning Dove
- Belted Kingfisher
- Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
- Rufous Hummingbird
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Common Flicker
- Red-Bellied Woodpecker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Barn Swallow
- Tree Swallow
- American Crow
- Northern Raven
- Blue Jay
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
- White-Breasted Nuthatch
- Eastern Bluebird
- American Robin
- Yellow Warbler
- Red-Winged Blackbird
- Common Grackle
- European Starling
- Northern Oriole
- Northern Cardinal
- American Goldfinch
- Red-Breasted Grosbeak

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Proactive Challenges & Solutions



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The Portage, Base & Whitewood Owners Association (PBWOA) represents owners on a series of lakes and connecting waters commonly referred to as the Huron River Chain of Lakes. Most PBWOA members reside on Little Portage, Portage, Baseline (Base), Tamarack and Whitewood Lakes. Other lakes on the Huron River Chain include Gallagher, Long (Loon), Strawberry and Zukey. There are several smaller lake associations serving individual subdivisions or waters. Each lake has its own personality and as with every lake and lake association there are ongoing challenges – some issues carry over from year to year and some are relatively new to the ‘problem’ pile. The PBWOA realizes this is a continual endeavor and hopes to address issues and include as many riparian owners – as well as temporary ‘users’ – as possible to help protect and preserve what we have. This chain of lakes serves a multitude of consumers, and is centrally located within driving distance to several large metropolitan areas providing employment, including Ann Arbor, Lansing, Brighton, Novi and others. It has become a very popular location for commuters who love the water and what that brings to their lifestyle.

The considerable area that these waters encompass involve six governmental bodies –townships of Putnam, Dexter, Webster and Hamburg as well as two counties – Livingston and Washtenaw. The mere size coupled with these different governments presents a multitude of challenges when approaching common problems. It seems everyone has differing views of what the lakes should be and what their individual roles might be in maintaining them.

So, sleepy summer cottage lake areas have given way to year-round homes and municipal sewer systems have replaced failing septic fields. As a result we have seen increased noise and more people on the lakes on a daily basis. Very few vacant lots remain. The diversity of the population and demands on the waters lends itself to growth issues and other problems with no universal answer. The PBWOA hopes to draw attention to our challenges, seek input from members, help educate riparians AND find

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Proactive Challenges & Solutions

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common workable solutions. We hope to make a difference by looking ahead, being proactive in our approach and educating our constituents all at the same time. The mere size of our area and ways of reaching everyone is perhaps the biggest challenge. A few years ago, we had overwhelming response from our membership that invasive weeds were their major concern. We contacted a company to analyze our situation and made recommendations for treatment. At first we were uncertain how to include the entire chain, not just our membership area because the problem clearly affected the entire waterway. Hamburg Township got on board and suggested to the other townships that it was a critical issue to support. Once all townships agreed, we jointly brought it to the attention of both counties. Washtenaw County agreed to take the lead since they had established successful lake cleanups in the past. This is now our first of a five year Lakes Improvement Project funded by our tax dollars (a special assessment); and, while it is not without its own hiccoughs, it is proving to be instrumental in attacking the issue. This will be a consistent, coordinated 'single' approach with a central biologist on board to monitor and assess. It also considers a 'fairness' factor with every taxpayer – riparian, back lot owners, businesses – all contributing to the cost with varying degrees of assessment. We are excited to see where this will lead.

With the weed issue being addressed, it is important to tackle the reason why this happened and to look at potential future causes. The challenge of people fertilizing lawns is paramount to the success of keeping our weeds under control. Many waterfront homeowners don't understand that while they are maintaining their lawns to be in pristine and weed-free competition with subdivision lawns, they are also



Purple loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria)

fertilizing and maintaining the weeds in the lakes. The runoff from well-meaning residents goes directly into the waters. Lawn service companies either don't care about the well-being of the lake or are blissfully ignorant on the recommended distance they need to be away from the water. One salesman for a lawn care company kept reiterating to me that their fertilizers were all 'organic' – and wouldn't harm anything – not understanding that fertilizer for grass leaches directly into the water and feeds the weeds whether it's 'organic' or not.

Another source for weeds entering the waters is boats entering at various launch sites – both public and private, mostly unmonitored. There is a State of Michigan public launch site that handles 30 or so boats each day. None of the sites provide washing stations to clean watercraft – nor even information that it should be being done at all. The

state provides no support to help with this washing effort and also bears no cost associated with cleanup.

With the influx of permanent residents and additional homes being added plus the popularity of social media, a phenomenon of sand bar parties has emerged. This is not unique to the Huron River Chain of Lakes, and there is no easy answer. Some residents have allowed friends or relatives to use 'docking' space and the several marinas are also using their shorelines to accommodate those who want to use the waters but who are not necessarily concerned about their care or condition. These boaters who have no shoreline or beach of their own are taking residence on sandbars and having weekend parties to the chagrin of the local homeowners. A meeting was held a few years back with both sides expressing concerns – littering, loud music, infringing on property from the homeowners and conversely the boaters expressing concern over their rights. A joint committee was unable to reach a solid solution but conceded that these people were allowed to be there and the nearby homeowners also were entitled to their privacy. Washtenaw County and Hamburg Township are providing more patrol power to monitor noise levels and objectionable behavior. The growth of these parties has spilled into the mouth of the river impeding navigation between the river and Base Lake as well encouraging unsafe crossing from those who may park along the shore, cross private property and attempt to wade across the river to awaiting boats. More oversight is needed and better communication with the state as to appropriateness of this problem.

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Proactive Challenges & Solutions

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The PBWOA is proud of where we've been and looking forward to being a catalyst for better education and preservation efforts for this important beautiful body of water. We have discussed and are implementing many methods of education such as a Community Bulletin Board with current information; a Facebook page to inform and generate interest; an updated user-friendly website with current and historical postings; a 300+ member email list, partnering with real estate agents with information for 'new' lakefront buyers; new PBWOA brochure to encourage additional membership and involvement and involved a Scientific Advisor in our decision-making process. We recently printed PBWOA Boat Stickers to identify members and encourage additional membership. Currently we are at an all-time membership high with a goal to reach many more riparians. An informational brochure/booklet is in the works to help educate all water residents on how to be better stewards for our waters. The committee is working on the best way to target certain groups - longtime home owners, young owners, new owners, established businesses and how to disseminate information in a proactive way.

We also support and have a board member on Michigan Lake and Stream Associations and sponsor a board member's attendance at their Annual Conference. We are members of the Michigan Shorelands Steward Program and have a board member who qualified her home as a silver-level shore land. A board member is attending the Leader's Institute for Michigan Lake and Streams with a lengthy commitment for participation. We have had three board members participate and graduate from the MSU Introduction to Lakes Course. We also support and interact with

the Huron River Watershed Council and Legacy Land Conservancy. By schooling our board members, we feel we are better able to provide education to the surrounding community and offer sound advice as needed.

The eleven member PBWOA Board of Directors meets monthly and encourages questions and attendance of concerned members. While the board is totally volunteer, we have an email site and a telephone where members can ask questions or voice concerns. There is also a Business Meeting in May where all members are encouraged to attend. The meeting reviews what we have accomplished over the past year and where we hope to be in another year. There are usually speakers and

short reports from the Marine Patrol and the PBWOA attorney on ongoing issues. We also encourage attendance for a Pizza Party in August initiated five years ago where members and board members casually interact on issues and concerns. This has turned into a very popular event.

Just as the board was instrumental several years ago in initiating better water quality with the implementation and introduction of sewers to the area and, more recently, taking on the task of cleaning up the invasive weed problem, we must be forward-thinking on educating and providing educational information, involving many more people. This is a long-term commitment with no quick fix. *R.*

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The PBWOA Board of Directors

Mark Teicher-President

Jon Waitz-Vice President

David Wilutis-Vice President

Jane Ollila-Secretary

John Hale-Treasurer

Chris Brenner-Board Member

James Jensen-Board Member

Craig Kivi-Board Member

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Jan Arps Prundean-Board Member

Greg Peter-Science Advisor

Ron Esch-Emeritus Board Member

Tom Hiller-Emeritus Board Member

Mark Purol-Emeritus Board Member

Paul Tryon-Emeritus Board Member

Hamburg Township Supervisor cites the PBWOA for its success.

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The Huron River chain of lakes through Hamburg Township in southeast Livingston County is a natural jewel. This focal point of Hamburg Township was the catalyst that propelled Hamburg Township to the distinction of being the fastest growing municipality in Michigan prior to the 2008 recession. Beginning after the Civil War, the hamlets of Lakeland and Hamburg Village, with rail service from Toledo, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan, gained notoriety as a recreational destination in the summer months, and with their spring-fed lakes coursing into the Huron River, a center for commercial ice production during the winter months.

With six miles of beautiful meandering river, and eight sparkling lakes, the area remained a recreational destination through the mid-1970s. Beginning after the 1973 oil embargo, the area experienced a 30 year transition from a summer cottage community to an upscale single family bedroom community. Progressive planning practices like the establishment of a Natural River Zoning District in 1978, and the first Open Space Zoned Community in Michigan in 1992 have truly preserved the natural beauty of Hamburg Township and the Huron River chain of lakes.

Much of the residential growth has been riparian. The Portage Base and Whitewood Owners Association Inc. (PBWOA) has been instrumental in organizing and educating riparian property owners along the Huron River chain of lakes. The benefits of this organization to residents, local government, recreational opportunities and the environmental quality of the Huron River chain of lakes cannot be overstated. For example, beginning in August of 2015, board members of PBWOA contacted local government officials seeking support for a four-township, two-county Lake Improvement Special Assessment District (SAD) for weed and alga control aimed primarily at the management of invasive species. With support from the Washtenaw County Office of the Water Resource Commissioner the process of establishing an ACT 185 SAD began in the fall of 2015. This five year SAD, encompassing seven of the eight lakes in the Huron River chain, was approved and implemented in the spring of 2017. In January of 2017, PBWOA initiated a three township invasive Mute Swan Control Resolution allowing the Department of Natural Resources, and the U. S. Department of the Interior, to implement a population management program for the invasive Mute Swan. With the leadership of the PBWOA, three other large lakes in our township have also successfully implemented a Mute Swan Control Program.

As a local Township Supervisor, it is a pleasure, and an asset to our community, to have a professional and progressive lake association like the Portage Base and Whitewood Owners Association Inc. I believe they establish a gold standard for all riparian based associations to emulate.

*Pat Hohl
Hamburg Township Supervisor*

Editor's Note: Part II of PBWOA & Portage Lake Chain will be in the spring 2018 issue of *The Michigan Riparian* magazine.