TLPA NEWS

Torch Lake Protection Alliance
Quarterly Newsletter
Fall 2026

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TLPA Mission

To preserve and protect the health and beauty of Torch Lake, its watershed and surrounding environment for generations to come.

Connect with us!

https://tlpa.co/

YouTube

Erin Otte-Steffen Named Executive Director of the Torch Lake Protection Alliance

The TLPA Board of Directors is very happy to announce Erin Otte-Steffen as its executive director. The ED role is critical to our mission of protecting Torch Lake now and for future generations especially in view of the increased scope and depth of our activities in recent years.



Erin is a northern Michigan native with nearly 20 years of experience working in nonprofit organizations. Her passion is in environmental stewardship and community building. Erin grew up in Elk Rapids before attending Michigan State University for her BA in Business Administration. She held multiple positions before relocating back to northern Michigan. Erin joined YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps for 10 years, first as the Director of Finance and HR and eventually as the Director of Business Operations & Engagement, supporting the camps mission of getting young people unplugged and out in nature.

She also serves as a member of the Grass River Natural Area's finance committee. After working on Torch Lake for 10 years, Erin has a deep appreciation for our local watershed and the community of people who love and enjoy the lake. She lives in Rapid City with her husband and two children. Erin is thrilled to join the TLPA team.

President's Message

The most corrosive action a township on Torch Lake can take is to NOT enforce its ordinances.

Think about it. A township elects officials and they work hard to put ordinances in place. They start with the desire to protect something the community has deemed to be of value. They do the hard work of gaining the consensus of the community on the ordinance language followed by its formal adoption.

Then all the effort is wastefully dissolved when a new set of officials come in and simply decide not to enforce the standing ordinances. That's not how it should work.

If officials don't like an ordinance, they should go through the process of changing it. They should involve their constituents in the process as is legally required. Pouring acid on an ordinance and hoping for the best is not a way to govern.

But it gets worse. Not enforcing a single ordinance melts down the entire edifice of regulations and the community as well. When some see they can do as they please in the face of opposing ordinances they simply do so. Time passes and the violation grows in scope such that confronting it with enforcement is even more difficult. To pile on, others use the "what about me" argument and they too follow suit with ordinance violations. It's off to the races.

Who loses? The water quality of Torch Lake gets sacrificed. Those that would prefer the lake not to be commercialized at their expense pay the price too.

Does this happen here? You bet it does. With great consequence.

What can you do? Let your township officials know you are holding them accountable when they look the other way. And that you stand with them when they choose to enforce.

Ultimately, in a democracy, we get what we elect. And what we ask for.

TLPA Membership Renewal 2027 - Tiered Options

The leaves are falling and the birds and snowbirds are headed south. It is also time to renew your Torch Lake Protection Alliance (TLPA) membership for 2027. It is important that we stay united in our efforts to protect and preserve our incredible lake. To advance that goal, after careful consideration of member feedback and best practices at peer associations, we are transitioning from a single membership dues amount to a tiered dues structure. This flexible structure allows members to support our mission at a level that fits their circumstances while ensuring our organization has the resources needed to protect Torch Lake.

Recently, you should have received mail and email notices reminding you to renew your membership and an explanation of our new tiered membership structure. Our base membership rate ($125) will remain unchanged. The new, higher tiers allow members to help accelerate our plans and better position the TLPA to carry out our strategic plans. Our membership year runs from January 1 to December 31.

We encourage you to use our auto renew option; it makes the renewal process easier for you and TLPA. If you elect to change your auto renewal amount, just log into Tlpa.co select the renew/join button select the recurring option and the new giving level. You can renew online at Tlpa.co, or mail a check to TLPA, PO Box 706, Bellaire MI, 49615. If you have any questions, contact us at tlpa@torchlake.com. We appreciate and need your support.

Township, State & Federal News

Forest Home

Dockside/Basecamp - The developer of the Basecamp project has submitted a PUD proposal to expand the Dockside restaurant, build new facilities for Dockside Watersports, add a coffee /ice cream/bakery, commercial retail space and 5 condominium units overlooking the water that will be used as short term rentals. The application seeks permission for a shared parking arrangement utilizing valet parking services, increased height allowances for a three-story mixed-use area as well as a lighthouse tower (71-feet to top of dome), residential units and reduced setbacks.

Basecamp and the Dockside project would share a wastewater system. TLPA and many residents have expressed serious concerns about the plan. A November 4 hearing before the Planning Commission was postponed to December 2 due to many more members of the public attending than the room at FH Township Hall could accommodate. The rescheduled hearing will be at Bellaire HS at 6 PM. TLPA remains very active on this issue.

If you wish to make your views known, attend the hearing on December 2 and/or write to the Zoning Administrator (sbarnard@foresthome township.com, PO Box 317 Bellaire, MI 49615.

The Dockside needs to be renovated, but the proposed expansion's scope presents numerous environmental concerns.

Conservation Easement - The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy succeeded in securing a Conservation Easement encompassing most of the existing footprint of Camp Hayo-Wenta-Ha, including over 6000 feet of lake frontage. This will prevent future development on the largest remaining untouched tract on Torch.

Clearwater

Marina in R-1 Zoning - The Zoning Board of Appeals ruling prohibiting a pontoon rental business in a residential zone is on appeal to the Circuit Court. TLPA is monitoring.

Sandbar - TLPA has initiated renewed discussions with township officials and law enforcement to explore strategies to address misconduct.

Milton

Weathertop - appears to have expanded the docking capacity of its waterfront site. TLPA is investigating

Short term rental ordinance - contested in District Court by Spirit Holdings with a class action lawsuit against the township. Current meetings are closed-door. TLPA will keep you informed.

Erosion - continues to be a big issue, especially in wetlands. Antrim County Soil Conservation Director is monitoring, and TLPA will follow.

The Cairn Club - group of investors is proposing a possible new 9 hole, semi-private golf course on Cairn Hwy. Very early stages, but we are following closely.

Fire Protection Millage - Public hearing had to be re-scheduled (timing TBD) due to number of attendees.

Torch Lake

Enforcement officer - The township has added an enforcement officer to monitor and ensure compliance with the Township short term rental ordinance. Eight violations have been noted thus far.

"Peterson Property" development - This is on hold as agreed to by both parties.

Banks

Many thanks to all our members who got out the vote for the Antrim County Conservation District election on July 23. Working together, we made a difference.

State of Michigan

Septic Legislation

H6066- in committee.

S771- Sen Singh feels confident of passage; floor vote pending.

Wake Boats

S 812- in committee. Boating industry association seeks to weaken the 500' from shore/ 20' depth legislation proposal to only 200' from shore with no depth restriction.

Local Control of Mining Regulation

S: 439-431, H 4526-4529- bills to transfer all regulation of mining to EGLE and DNR from local oversight- no activity until 2027.

Special Boat Tag for Invasive Species Funding

H 5308: passed House. in Senate committee (*Co-sponsored by Representative John Roth)*

Bottled Water Bill" - Water Supply Systems Reg S 950, 951: in committee. Provides for state royalties on bottled water extracted in Michigan. Applies to Torch because projected revenues are $1Billion annually, to be placed in a Trust Fund for water quality issues in state.

Federal

Invasive Species Control

HR 8876: aquatic invasive species control and prevention act of 2026- in committee.

HR 6053: save the great lakes fisheries act of 2026. No movement in committee since Feb (*Co-sponsored by Representative Jack Bergman).*

KTLB (Keep Torch Lake Blue) Update

The August USGS report to TLPA was very well received by all the Keep Torch Lake Blue donors in attendance. Dale Robertson (USGS) and Tom Joseph (TLPA) presented a comprehensive look at the three-year study. While this was a verbal report, the written final USGS report will become available in 2027.

The Keep Torch Lake Blue fundraising effort was very successful, and our campaign created the most comprehensive look of the many areas that impact Torch Lake. We are committed to continuing our water monitoring program. Continuous rigorous testing is vital for monitoring and protecting the long-term health of our waters.

We seek support from all who love Torch Lake later this year when we ask for contributions to continue the program for 2027 in a more limited capacity. Thank-you to everyone who has given so generously, and we thank-you for your continued support of our state-of-the-art water monitoring program.

Socialize with TLPA!

There are more ways than ever to connect with TLPA, our activities, events and our mission! You can find us on the web: on Facebook, Instagram and on YouTube! We invite you to engage with other members, board members and our business members.

@torchlakeprotectionalliance @tlpa1 @torchlakeprotectionalliance https://tlpa.co/

Scientific Collaboration Advances Quagga Mussel Research on Torch Lake

In 2024, the Keep Torch Lake Blue (KTLB) project team confirmed the presence of quagga mussels in Torch Lake. Our research indicated that these invasive mussels may affect the lake's nutrient balance, particularly its phosphorus concentration. In consultation with our U.S. Geological Survey partners, we identified three key questions: How many quagga mussels are in the lake? Where are they located? What is their composition?

Connecting with Scientific Expertise

As we developed a survey plan, we sought expert guidance. Mark Rowe, who participated in our 2024 adaptive management meeting, connected us with Dr. Ashley K. Elgin, a research benthic ecologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory (GLERL).

Dr. Elgin studies the benthic environment of the Great Lakes. Invasive dressed mussels account for more than 95 percent of benthic biomass in every Great Lake except Lake Superior. Through laboratory and field experiments, she investigates dreissenid growth and reproduction and leads GLERL's long-term benthic monitoring program, which includes annual surveys of southern Lake Michigan.

From Planning to Partnership

After reviewing a draft of our plan with Dr. Elgin, we invited her to speak at KTLB's adaptive management meeting in May 2025. Her advice and support proved invaluable as we prepared to survey the lake, document mussel distribution, and evaluate phosphorus concentrations.

A New Research Opportunity

In 2026, Dr. Stephen K. Hamilton, a researcher from the Leelanau lakes area and a mutual colleague, contacted us about a new initiative involving Dr. Elgin. We welcomed the opportunity to support the work and, in a small way, return the assistance she had provided to KTLB.

Dr. Elgin is collaborating with researchers at Grand Valley State University to develop a smartphone application that could identify mussels from photographs. The goal is to distinguish species—including quagga and zebra mussels—and potentially recognize age or other characteristics. The machine-learning project will require several thousand images to train and refine its algorithms. The team's initial request was for 100 specimens to launch the research.

Delivering Samples for the Study

On September 27, KTLB delivered 100 quagga mussels to the Grand Valley State University research team. The specimens were organized into four groups, each documented with its Torch Lake collection location via GPS coordinates, date of collection, and water depth. The accompanying photograph shows one of those sample groups.



Welcome New Members

Family/Individuals

Lucy Woodward
Robert & Colleen Trombly
Sharon & Mark Mason
Steve & Holly Mead
Karen & Mark McNish
Brian & Robin Crumrine
Erin E. Steffen (our new Ex Dir)
Denise Alessi
Laurie McKeon
Karen Swanson

Business

Storage NoMi

Memorials

George & Barbara Bailey in memory of Ray Erlandson, Jr
Barbara & John Carton in memory of Daniel M. Boone
Karen Atcheson in honor of Jim and Laura Nance

Support our Business Partners

A-Ga-Ming Golf Resort
Alden – Bellaire Lumber and Hardware
Alden Mill House
Alden State Bank
Aubertin Tree Service
Avery Excavation
Barker Creek Nursery & Landscaping
Birch Street Dental
Blackmore Landscaping
Bruce's Earthworks
Bruce's Excavation & Landscaping
Chemical Control Co.
The Chief Golf Course/Blue Pelican
Coomer Consulting
Creative Characters Printing
DLH Builders
Don Fedrigon Re/Max of Elk Rapids
Drogt Excavation
Elk Rapids Marina
Elk Rapids Electric
Ethanology Distillations
Fitzpatrick Insurance Agency
Great Lakes Cottage Watch
Great Northern Benefits, LLC
Harbor Flooring – Elk Rapids
Jay Merchant Builders
Kidd & Leavy Real Estate
Landscape Logic
Luhr's Landing
Mapleridge Construction
Midlake Builders
North Country Power Generation
Northshore Dock & Marine
Painting by Don
The Pear Tree
Pine Hill Nursery
Providence Organic Farm
Restoration Services of Michigan
Serve Electric
Steve Jessmore Photography
Storage NoMi
Sun Lifes Marina (Torch River)
365 Outdoor Inc.
Taylor Tree Health Care
TBA Credit Union
Top Notch Heating, Cooling, and Geothermal
Urban Diversions
Village Market Food Centers
YMCA Hayo-Went-Ha Camps

TLPA welcomes all businesses to join!

Visit https://tlpa.co/ for information.

Business Spotlights

Steve Jessmore is a National Audubon winning photographer of Michigan Birds and has published his first book "The Splendor Next Door". It is now available and is a beautiful coffee table book. He also has 2027 calendars along with wonderful bird prints and cards, many photos taken from the Torch River area. Orders can be placed from his website which is stevejessmore.com.

We're proud to recognize **Avery Excavating**, one of the valued business members supporting the Torch Lake Protection Alliance. As a family-owned local company with deep experience in excavation, sitework, gravel delivery, and septic services, Avery Excavating understands the care and stewardship that help protect Torch Lake while supporting responsible property projects.

Their website highlights the broad range of services they provide:

"We provide high-quality sitework services for residential projects and light commercial work, including full site development for new homes, land clearing, driveway installation, foundation excavation, septic system installation, and final grading. We also provide site development and land clearing for larger properties, including horse farms, hunting land, trails, and food plot installations. In addition, we carry a full range of gravel products, including 22A and 23A road gravel, Afton Road gravel, 6AA crushed clean rock, 10A round stone, and more."

If you're planning a project that calls for dependable local expertise, we encourage you to consider Avery Excavating. Learn more at **https://averyexcavating.com/**.