

The THOMPSON LAKE

OBSERVER

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Sue Ellis captured this tranquil scene in Black Island Cove.

22 TONS OF MILFOIL REMOVED FROM THOMPSON LAKE

(See story page 4)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The summer that wasn't! If medals were given out for most rain in a summer, the summer of 2008 would have earned a good medal! We do hope everyone was able to enjoy some sunshine in between Mother Nature's powerwashes.

TLEA's latest and most promising project was the development and launching of the Hippobottomus, our milfoil harvester boat. Some lake residents may have seen it hard at work in heavily infested areas. The Hippo had a most successful first season, harvesting tons of milfoil which was later deposited on nearby farm fields as fertilizer. This project holds great promise in reducing invasive plants from our lake and improving our water quality. This results in a healthier ecosystem, a more attractive lake, and improved property values. The operation of the Hippobottomus is costly, and it will take years to completely eradicate the milfoil. Our funds are limited, but if every property owner on Thompson Lake joined TLEA, we would have no problem funding this project. As of now, only 25 to 30 percent of the lake residents are members. Our goal should be 100 percent.

Despite Mother Nature's frequent tantrums, TLEA's planned events took place as scheduled. The I-Did-a-Paddle was lightly attended with the rain holding off until after lunch. Our Pig Roast featured live entertainment and was well attended – and the rain again held off until the very end. That was the summer's pattern. Overall, the events went well, with generously donated handcrafted items up for raffle at the Pig Roast and Annual Meeting. All proceeds from sales and raffles benefitted TLEA.

The directors of TLEA wish to thank Tom Ray for his dedication as co-president for the past seven years. His time and attention to TLEA over the years has had a positive impact on the quality of Thompson Lake. His efforts are appreciated by all. Thank you, Tom!

In closing, I want to stress the importance of getting involved with your lake association—TLEA. Become a member. Be observant when it comes to invasive plants. Correct erosion and runoff problems on your property. Save the duff! Just these simple steps will continue to keep our lake clean. Above all, enjoy Thompson Lake this fall in all its splendor. I am looking forward to serving as your new co-president.

Kathy Cain, Co-President

[Editor's note: The following thoughts and photo were contributed by a nice fellow who has spent a long time sitting and admiring Thompson Lake.]



ADIRONDACK ON THOMPSON

I have a lot to be thankful for – a wonderful family, a successful career, and wonderful friends. But I am especially thankful for my memories of the beauty of Thompson Lake as seen from my Adirondack chair. Sunrises, sunsets, sunny days, rainy days, misty days, even snowy days. Only a dozen boats on the lake on the 4th of July. Can this lake really be so quiet all the time? And as all of you know, every day is different, and, oh so beautiful in its own way. If I ever make it to heaven, I only hope they will have an Adirondack chair with my name on it looking out onto a view of the lake. I can't imagine anything more blissful.

LOON COUNTERS FIND 13

For more years than anyone can remember, TLEA has been taking part in the annual Audubon Society's Loon Count. The goal is to determine what's happening to Maine's loon population. Once again this year the volunteers for Thompson Lake were out on the lake at 7 a.m. on July 21, binoculars in hand. This year once again 13 loons were sighted. The good news is that spotters found four chicks. Two of these hatched on Sand Island in Otisfield Cove. Unfortunately one of these two disappeared shortly after the count.

Interested in helping out next summer? Give Peggy Dorf, Loon Coordinator, a call at 539-2973.

HIPPOBOTTOMUS REMOVES 22 TONS OF MILFOIL

That's correct – you read it right. During the summer of 2008, divers attached to TLEA's milfoil fighter, the Hippobottomus, removed 22 tons of milfoil from the bottom of Thompson Lake. That's 44,000 pounds hand-pulled, brought up, bagged, trucked off, and safely turned into compost.

The operation wasn't done on the cheap. It took more than \$51,000 to purchase and refurbish a pontoon boat and to hire professional divers and crew to operate the boat for 43 days. Nevertheless, TLEA's directors consider it money well spent. As one put it, "If TLEA doesn't tackle the milfoil problem in Thompson, who will?" Generous contributions from several individuals, the town of Poland, and the Camp Fernwood Foundation helped offset this major outlay of funds.

As the article in the Spring *Observer* noted, the summer operation of the Hippobottomus took a great deal of planning. There were also the kind of problems expected with starting up a new venture. First Karen Hahnel of the Department of Environmental Protection had to approve the system and inspect the four major harvesting sites—Pine Point, Otisfield Cove, Hancock Cove, and Edwards Cove. Rob McVety, with whom TLEA contracted to run the operation, had to be trained in hand-pulling milfoil. The Bridgton-based Lakes Environmental Association, which operated a similar system last year, served as a model and provided Rob with training on LEA's Libra boat on Little Sebago Lake. Meantime the TLEA directors had trouble obtaining an appropriate pontoon boat, and there were delays in modifying the boat's superstructure. Once in the water, the Hippo's vacuum pump proved too powerful for the sluice box connections. The pump delivered so much water to the sluice box that the boat almost sank. Drilling large holes in the floor solved this problem. In addition, the divers' air hoses developed leaks and torn lines.

Once all these problems were solved, the summer's work progressed smoothly. In addition to Rob McVety, the crew consisted of Chris McVety and Chris Wight. Sarah Burnham in her kayak served as volunteer fragment-snatcher. The Hippo was stationed in Otisfield Cove for 10 days, Hancock Cove for 5, and Edwards Cove for 2. For 26 days the Hippo operated in the Pine Point area, near the Greeley Brook causeway in Oxford, which, according to TLEA's Scott Bernardy, has the most extensive milfoil concentration in Thompson.

The weather produced some problems. During the very wet summer of 2008, frequent thunderstorms meant that some ten days' work had to be rescheduled by having the crew shift to weekend days or having the crew work longer hours. One unanticipated problem arose the first week of operation when Rob McVety spent a day in the hospital after a leech attachment point on his leg became infected

The last step in the milfoil extraction process was to truck the milfoil away from the lake. After being drained through the sluice box on the deck on the boat, the milfoil was bagged in mesh corn/produce bags, each of which held about 40 pounds. Each bag was used only two or three times, which meant that during the summer the Hippo crew went through a total of 450 bags. The actual milfoil became rich farmer's compost, most of it being deposited on a community farm in Harrison. At summer's end, after TLEA's contracted weeks were completed but before McVety's divers headed back to their respective schools, the Hogan-Whitney Pond Association rented TLEA's Hippobottomus for several days and contracted separately with McVety. In three days' work on Hogan Pond the McVety crew finished clearing a milfoil infestation that others had spent weeks on using more traditional methods but had failed to complete. Finally, in early September Rob McVety and TLEA director Bob Tracy pulled the Hippo from the lake and spent a full day cleaning and winterizing the boat, preparing it for hibernation in the Hankins barn in Otisfield.

Twenty-two tons later, everyone agrees that the Hippobottomus got off to a great start, eliminating far more milfoil than expected. TLEA is optimistic that it will be able to raise the funds for a repeat performance next summer.



The McVety Milfoil Removal Company in Pine Point area. Rob McVety in kayak; Chris McVety in water; Chris Wight in boat. (Photo, Bob Tracy)

NEW INFESTATION OF EURASIAN MILFOIL CONFIRMED

Eurasian water milfoil, one of Maine's eleven most unwanted invasive aquatic plants, was confirmed as present in Salmon Lake in Belgrade, Kennebec County, on August 1. Although 29 Maine lakes, including Thompson, have infestations of the less virulent variable milfoil, this is only the second Maine water body known to have the Eurasian type. Before this summer it had been confined to one small quarry pond in Scarborough.

According to state officials, they may have caught the Salmon Lake plants in time to solve the problem. After an alert summer resident spotted it in a shallow cove, two volunteer lake monitors quickly reported and documented the infestation. State DEP officials, particularly concerned because Salmon Lake is a headwater of the Belgrade Lakes, scheduled a dive team to hand pull the plants. They will follow with an in-depth survey of the entire lake and an outlet stream feeding into Great Pond. They also plan to erect more signs at the nearby boat ramp and increase the hours of the courtesy boat inspectors.



Cindy with perch, Otisfield Cove, Summer 2008. (Photo, Bob Tracy)



*Jessica and Charlotte Winiarski complete the I-Did-a-Paddle.
(Photo, Kathy Cain)*

WRAPPING UP THE SUMMER EVENTS

Annual meeting: This year's session on August 2 at Agassiz Village had featured speakers Dana Lee, the Town Manager of Poland; Scott Bernardy, TLEA's Environmental Committee Chair; and Scott Williams, the executive director of Maine's Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program. We heard reports about the Hippobottomus and invasive plants. We applauded Tom Ray's many years of service as he steps down as president (but not off the board). We applauded Kathy Cain's stepping up to the Co-Presidency, and we cheered as Sue Ellis announced she'd stay on as the other Co-President. In addition, the TLEA members present elected two new directors, Ed Keefe and Barry Jorve.

I-Did-a-Paddle: The weather on July 19 was decent, the paddlers enjoyed themselves, and the food at Pismo Beach was good. But this year the organizers discovered that the number of support boats and helping hands far outnumbered the participants. This event requires much planning, preparation, and just plain hard work. So, a little reluctantly, we've decided to put the event into retirement – at least for now.

Pig Roast: Our 3rd annual Pig Roast, held on a beautiful August 16 at Agassiz, drew 90 hungry people who stuffed their stomachs as they listened to blue grass and country western played by the Travis James Humphrey Band from Portland. We plan to repeat this next year.

YCC PUTS IN PLENTY OF PLUNGE POOLS

As the photo below shows, the Youth Conservation Corps undertook one really tough erosion control problem this summer at a summer residence on Beehive Lane, just off Ohuivo Road in Otisfield. This involved an intermittent stream that plunged down a steep hillside above a driveway, pooled and puddled its way across the drive, and then ran a ragged route down another short, steep slope and eroding its way past the entrance to a building before finally carrying parts of the hillside soil into the lake. The YCC spent two weeks placing crushed stones on a long section of driveway and, most dramatically, using rip-rap to build a series of plunge pools both above and below the drive. For the most part, the new configuration did a good job of funneling the water cleanly into the lake despite the heavy rains this summer. In a couple of spots the rocks had to be restructured, but the basic design worked well. Not only does it keep the driveway from turning periodically into a mudhole, but it looks good too. This is one of the most ambitious projects the YCC has completed in its seven years of operation.

According to coordinator Joe Kiley, this year's YCC completed a total of 25 such erosion control projects this summer, working in all four towns on the lake. The crew consisted of Drew McLaren, crew chief; Caleb Hill; Jessie Pierce; and Justin St. John. Joe pointed out, with pride, that despite the frequent bad weather during their eight-week schedule, the YCC lost only three hours of work, a real tribute to their dedication and reliability.





Pig Roast diners Bobbie Hayden and Herb Korn (above) and Tasha and Josef Powers at Agassiz Village. (Photos: Kathy Cain)



TLEA HELPS SEND 43 STUDENTS TO ACADIA

Forty-three sixth-grade students from Oxford Elementary School will spend three days at Acadia National Park in early November, participating in the park's Schoodic Education Adventure, thanks to TLEA's generous sponsorship of the trip. As part of its ongoing effort to promote conservation knowledge among youngsters, Acadia National Park itself has also made a large financial contribution to this program.

On November 3 the students, accompanied by teachers Sandy Roderick and Nancy Philbrick and a number of parent volunteers, will travel by bus to Acadia for three days of environmental study and mapping instruction, plus a heavy dose of hands-on experience within the park. The \$50 per student donation will cover meals and bunkhouse lodging. National park rangers will serve as instructors, assisted by the Oxford teachers. Included in the three days are a habitat hike, in which students will learn how to use research tools, read topographic maps, plot sites, and record their observations. Another unit, named "Forest Succession and GPS," will teach students how to track regrowth of vegetation by using maps, longitude and latitude measures, and GPS data. And a two-hour hike along Schoodic Point will emphasize basic geological principles.

Teacher Sandy Roderick, who is also a TLEA director, was a bit overwhelmed by TLEA's vote to contribute \$2200 to this venture. She responded, "Your extremely generous donation will help 43 sixth graders get a trip of a lifetime." The teachers have promised to return with lots of good photos of their adventure.

DEP AWARDS TLEA GRANT FOR NEW SURVEY

Late this summer TLEA received word that DEP has granted the organization \$16,100 for the next phase of its three-part survey of erosion problems in the Thompson Lake watershed. Jeff Stern, assisted by Jean Hankins and Jim Bishop, wrote the successful proposal, which was one of 22 submissions.

The award is contingent on federal funding to the state. TLEA's share of the total is approximately \$11,000, of which a major portion will be in in-kind match (chiefly volunteer time). As soon as we receive the final go-ahead from the DEP, TLEA will begin the necessary planning for the new stage of the survey, involving the Casco and Poland parts of the watershed, which we hope to conduct in April 2009. The winter issue of the *Observer* will have more details.

BOAT INSPECTORS DO THEIR JOB QUIETLY BUT WELL

You've seen them every weekend, sitting in lawn chair or van near the boat ramps, sometimes under a beach umbrella, staring out into the lake. Their job is simply to talk to those putting boats in and taking boats out of the lake, checking for plant fragments and making sure the operators understand the seriousness of the threat of invasive plants. Sometimes called "milfoil monitors," TLEA's courtesy boat inspectors have been doing their job quietly but well for the past seven years.

The state's sticker program covers most of the cost of this program. This year TLEA employed high school students Matt McVety and Laurie Riihimaki from Otisfield, Tate Tibbetts from Oxford, and Ian Hodgkiss from Poland. Returning for his third year was retiree Gary Garcelon of Oxford.

This summer, according to TLEA director Jim Bishop, coordinator of the program, the monitors counted 556 boats in the first half of the summer and only 325 in the second part, for a summer total of 881. This compares with 864 for the summer of 2007. Incidentally, Jim adds that TLEA's Treasurer Chris Pottle, who handles the payroll, and Jim Bishop, who recruits, supervises, and keeps track of everything, volunteered 120 hours on this project alone.

Only three plant fragments were discovered, all attached to boats leaving the lake. Since the inspectors were only on duty during weekends and holidays, the statistics represent only a fraction of the total boat traffic on Thompson.



For a piece of string: cedar waxwing unraveling a basketball net.

(Photo Bob Tracy)

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