THE THOMPSON LAKE OBSERVER

Summer 2016 Issue No. 179

Photo by Jim Whalen

I'm nesting here!

DON'T FORGET: TLEA Annual Meeting, August 6

Annual Meeting

Our Thompson Lake Environmental Association Annual Meeting will be held from 9:00- 11:00 on Saturday, August 6, at the Oxford Recreational Center at the intersection of Rt. 121 and King Street, Oxford. This is your chance to hear about the environmental issues affecting the lake and what TLEA is doing about them. It is also a chance to have your voice heard if you have a question or concern about the lake. We will have elections for board members, a 50/50 raffle and plenty of baked goods and refreshments. Our key note speaker will be David Van Wie, environmental writer and photographer, as well as former Maine House of Representatives member and employee of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Dave will speak about protecting water quality and shore land zoning. There will be TLEA merchandise for sale, including our popular Thompson Lake woven throws, lake maps, cutting boards, apparel and much more. Don't miss out! Come and learn about the lake and meet your neighbors.

TLEA's Milfoil Management's 10 year Anniversary

(Submitted by Scott Bernardy)

Thompson Lake was one of the first of ten lakes identified as having milfoil in the early 1980's. Soon this plant had invaded many of our more shallow coves and over fifty lakes in Maine have become infested with this invasive species. Milfoil mitigation on Thompson Lake began in 2006 with a volunteer crew laying down tarps in Otisfield to turn the tide against this expanding menace. This effort expanded into our present program in which we have a full summer time crew that attacks the milfoil with benthic and biodegradable tarps, as well as diver assisted suction harvesting (DASH).

Our milfoil management has been most successful in the coves of Otisfield, Edwards, Hancock and Serenity. Initially these coves were host to over two acres of milfoil infestation each. Our divers identifying the tell-tale red stem of variable milfoil in order to remove it and preserve the native species, such as bladderwort and Maine coon tail. Through the use of hand pulling, tarps and DASH in these areas milfoil has been reduced to only isolated patches and native plants have rebounded to almost natural levels. The most challenging area of the lake is Pine Point, where what started as a small patch of milfoil in the 80's has turned into ten acres of heavy milfoil infestation. The Maine DEP has ruled out the option of using

herbicides to control this rapid growth for now and the cost to manually reduce it would exceed $250,000 over a four year period, which is well past our budget.

At this point, TLEA's primary goal is to reduce the milfoil fragmentation that is primarily generated from Pine Point. Our strategy is to create a six yard wide, 340 yard long boating corridor through the use of biodegradable tarps. These tarps lie flat and should not billow up and catch on boat propellers, allowing Pine Point residents and visitors to navigate this area. This burlap tarp has also been placed around the docks in this area. The intent is to keep the milfoil contained by preventing fragmentation by boat propellers, which is the chief source of spreading this invasive plant to other areas of the lake.

We are asking all boaters to avoid any activity out of the boat corridor. If you need to motor outside the corridor, we ask that you raise your propeller as high as possible when in milfoil infested areas and to remove any plant fragments from your motor before returning to the main body of the lake. Please dispose of any collected plant fragments far from any bodies of water.

Without TLEA's Milfoil abatement program the spread of variable leaf milfoil would go unchecked; causing the more sheltered areas in our lake to become inundated by the heavy growth, which could lead diminished recreational activity as well as an inevitable decline in property values.

Youth Conservation Corp

Steve Arnold has taken over the reins of our Youth Conservation Corp and he reports his crew is hard at work on erosion control projects around the lake. **If you have problem with erosion on your property, now is the time to do something about it.** This may be an unstable shore line, a bank with runoff or a driveway with inadequate drainage that allows water to flow into the lake. Steve and his crew can provide the labor to construct barriers, do plantings, create culverts and drains or build rip rap to stabilize your bank. Contact Steve at:sa03842@yahoo.com.

Courtesy Boat Inspections

(Submitted by TLEA Co-President Marcia Matuska)

Marcia Matuska reports that our Courtesy Boat inspectors have been assisting boaters this summer in preventing the transport of invasive species to and from the lake. Inspectors are doing weekend duty at the launches at the Casco Marina, Pismo

Beach and the Landing, as well as part time at Robinson's Marina. Compared to other states, Maine has relatively few invasive water plants. As of June 19th, one courtesy boat inspector has removed plants from 7 boats leaving the lake. These are all most likely variable leaf milfoil, but the official identifications are pending. Please take advantage of this free and important service and get into the habit of inspecting your own boat upon entering or leaving the lake.

Over the Memorial Day weekend at the Marina, one of our members approached me and offered to volunteer his time as a CBI inspector. It would be wonderful to expand our hours. The boaters are usually very friendly and cooperative and it is a great way to meet your neighbors. Next year, we may be adding volunteer inspectors. ***If you are interested in volunteer opportunities or have any questions regarding TLEA, send me an email at*** mmtlea@gmail.com.

The Oxford Dam 2016

The water level of Thompson Lake plays an important role in the prevention of shoreline erosion, protection of our native fisheries and the recreational use of this lake. The level of the lake is controlled by the Robinson Mill Dam, a 150+ year old structure that lies at the outlet of the lake at the northern terminus of the lake, in the town of Oxford (See photo on page 7). The dam was built in 1863 during the construction of the Robinson Mill. This raised the level of the lake approximately 10 feet and converted the outlet river to a "channel" that is now adjacent to Pismo beach. The sole purpose of the dam was to turn the water wheel that in turn powered the looms of this woolen textile mill, so little consideration was given to lake levels.

The town of Oxford took over the operation of the mill in 2009 when the defunct mill became delinquent on property taxes. As the dam was no longer needed to power the mill there became an opportunity to re-assess the water level guidelines to maximize the recreational and environmental benefits. The town requested that TLEA study this issue and provide recommendations. The Dam Committee of TLEA was then created, with the goal of establishing lake levels that will: 1) reduce shoreline erosion, 2) protect spawning grounds for the fishery and 3) optimize the summer recreational use of the lake.

The committee researched dam operations of surrounding lake and ponds, reviewed the historical levels of Thompson Lake and the effects of rain storms and

spring runoff and consulted with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. The following recommendations were made: The fall draw down of the lake should start the week after Columbus Day, to a winter level of 32 inches below the top of the dam by the first week in November. In order to prevent scouring of the shore by ice the water level increase should start directly after ice out to establish a summer level of 14 inches from the top of the dam by Memorial Day weekend. The dam would be operated to maintain these levels to within plus or minus two inches on a daily basis. These proposals were presented at an Oxford town meeting in the summer of 2012 and were accepted without objections.

The dam is comprised of three gates. The east and west gates are a system of stacked wooden planks and the center gate has a motorized metal sliding gate that is presently not functional. TLEA made the strong recommendation that the center gate be made functional in order to more efficiently maintain the water level and reduce the accumulation of sludge at the head water of the dam.

The Dam Operator

The man who makes this all happen is Craig Delano, former employee of the Robinson Mill and now of the Town of Oxford. I had a chance to talk to him one

morning this spring as he was measuring the water levels and checking on the dam. He is a personable, energetic man and a true “Mainer”. Craig has been operating the dam since 1973 and has seen it evolve from a power source to a sewage control device and then to an environmental tool. He has seen days when water levels were consistently erratic and the outlet river would run red or blue depending on what type of wool was being produced in the mill. We have come a long way from that, thanks to the Clean Water Act and an increased awareness of the environment.

Craig checks the level of water from the top of the dam every day, 365 days a year. He controls the level by removing or replacing planks from one of the side gates. This is an arduous and slow process often requiring 2 people. During high water levels the planks need to be lassoed with ropes at either end and by gradually lifting alternate ends of the plank and tying them off; progressing inch by inch and eventually removing them from the gate. This is probably not much different from how it was done in 1863.

“When the ground is full of water, if we get 2 inches of rain this place goes up 4 inches” Craig noted. This is usually in the spring and that is by far his busiest time. “3 years ago we had 6 inches of rain and he had everything open and the water was still running over the top.” The center gate can be raised by a hand crank, but the ratio is 100 cranks to 1 inch. “You get pretty tired” Craig admits. Despite his efforts, the dam, as presently operated, cannot efficiently manage the high flows we see in the spring and with summer storms.

The problem is that when the water level rises, areas of the shoreline that do not have erosion barriers are flooded and this can cause a large increase in sediment and phosphorous run off that will stimulate the growth of algae which will eventually deplete the oxygen levels of the lake and could lead to algae blooms. Shoreline structures such as docks and stairs can also be damaged.

The good news is that the town of Oxford has approved a new budget that allocates $5,000 for the restoration of a 120 Amp power source to the center gate of the dam. Through some Yankee ingenuity, Craig has removed the gear box from the gate motor so that a 120 Amp driven drill can turn a drive shaft that will raise and lower the gate. Lake residents should be thankful to the town of Oxford and employees like Craig. With the assistance of the Thompson Lake Environmental Association, they are working to protect the lake and provide for recreational activities on this special body of water.

Briefly Noted

Our annual loon count will be held Saturday, July 16, 7:00-8:00 AM.

Don't forget to support TLEA by donating your used bottles to our Clynk program. The Clynk bags can be picked up at the TLEA office or at 37 Black Island Rd. For more info call the TLEA office at 539-4535

Who Has the Oldest Camp on the Lake ?

Lois Witham of Mechanic Falls writes: "I am wondering of we may have the oldest camp on Thompson Lake. This summer it will be 125 years old. We call it Farris Camp because my grandfather Dr.Henry Farris purchased the land when he was 19 for $25 ! In my 80 years there isn't a summer when I haven't enjoyed a few weeks there…the camp is off Rick's Camp Road , in Oxford. Does anyone have an older camp on Thompson Lake ? Thanks to all who help keep the lake and shores clean and attractive." Is there an older camp on the lake ? If you have one let me know at and you too can be in the Observer:paulcain@myfairpoint.net

Oxford Dam. East and west gates open, center gate closed (Photo by Paul Cain)

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www.thompsonlake.org

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