



Fall 2024

Issue No. 204



Nature's Art on Thompson Lake- Photo by Brian Bond

TLEA 319 Grant Program is Approved 😊

TLEA is very pleased to announce that our 319 Grant application for 2025-26 has been provisionally accepted by the Maine DEP. This application was possible because of the watershed survey that we conducted in 2023. The application was written by Emma Larusso of the Androscoggin Valley Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) based upon our survey and the 10-year Watershed Protection Plan we developed. Androscoggin Valley SWCD will be the project manager for this application phase. We have an opportunity to apply for 4 more cycles of 2-year grants for the next 8 years. These grant funds will be used to support major erosion control projects proposed by towns or road associations, smaller projects by individual landowners, our YCC, educational and outreach programs and workshops for road associations. What a great way to preserve the water quality of Thompson Lake!

The grant program will start on January 1, 2025. The larger scale projects in this application phase include road improvements in the Beechwoods area (3-5 sites), ditch and culvert work at the Loop Road area of Otisfield, and erosion control measures at a walking trail at Agassiz Village camp. Individual landowners can apply for residential matching grants (RMG's) for projects to address low and medium erosion impact sites. They will pay expenses initially, but can receive up to \$750 as a 50% match from the grant. Landowners who use our YCC for erosion control work will only have to pay for materials for approved projects.

We also plan to conduct education and outreach activities for the Build Better Buffers program, as well as Gravel Road Maintenance workshop for road associations. The 319 funds will also support our newsletter, annual meeting, informational mailings to the membership and our educational programs at the local schools. All these programs will require matching funds from TLEA.

Requests for participation in these programs will be considered after January 1, 2025. Information on how landowners can use the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program will be outlined later in this newsletter. For those who are interested in applying for residential matching grants, requests can be submitted to the Androscoggin Valley SWCD at projectdirector@androscogginswwcd.org after January 1. The request should have the landowner's name and address, as well as the sector/site# and description of the erosion issue, which can be found in the 2023 Watershed Survey Report at our website: thompsonlake.org, under the heading of "Watershed".

Non- Point Source pollution such as erosion is by far the biggest threat to water quality to Maine lakes, and the impact is worsening with the effect of climate change. Thompson Lake had its highest recorded seasonal water temperature in 2024. This increases the growth of algae, which is fertilized by soil nutrient runoff. Developed lands that have improper drainage of roads and driveways, unfettered run-off from lawns, exposed soils, paths or driveways draining into the lake or inadequate shoreline vegetative buffers are the biggest contributors to erosion. Our 319 Grant will assist TLEA, landowners, road associations and towns to do something about this. If you would like to know more about this program contact TLEA Board member Paul Cain at tleawatershed2023@gmail.com.

Youth Conservation Corps

Program Director Jim Skinner reports that the YCC had a very productive 2024 season. The crew, led by Project Coordinator Chris Stoechner, worked on over 20 properties throughout the watershed. This work involved reducing erosion with Best Management Practices (BMP's), as defined by the Maine DEP, such as placing box culverts, razor bar, infiltration steps, erosion control mulch, rain gardens and planting of vegetative buffers. Over 40 of these BMP's were installed, protecting an estimated 800 feet of shoreline. The YCC team worked with McLaughlin Gardens to perform 8 Build Better Buffers consultations. Quite an accomplishment for a program that was revived in 2022.

Chris is an educator at Oxford Hills Technical School and he, along with Jim, directed a crew of 3 laborers from local schools. The crew quickly learned environmental conservation principles and became skilled in performing high quality erosion control work. The good news is that Chris and the crew plan to return for next season. Jim remains busy providing educational programs to landowners and town Code Enforcement Officers, as well as site reviews in preparation for the 2025 season.

This program will also continue its collaboration with McLaughlin Gardens with the Build Better Buffers program, as described later in this Observer.

The YCC will be receiving matching funds from the 319 Grant Program in 2025-2026. The program should help fund at least 20 site projects during this time. For as long as the grant funds are available, landowners of approved projects will only have to cover the cost of materials. They will receive technical assistance and labor at no cost. The requests for participation in this program will be considered on a first come first served basis. This is a great opportunity to improve properties,

control erosion and protect the lake from phosphorous run-off. If you have an erosion control project in mind for next year, contact Jim Skinner at tlea.yccdirector@gmail.com.

LakeSmart

Ron Armontrout, our director of the LakeSmart program, reports they had a busy season in 2024. Ron and the team of 9 trained volunteers evaluated over 30 properties, with 6 properties earning a LakeSmart Award. The other property owners were given detailed instructions on how to further reduce erosion and possibly qualify for this award in the future. Since its inception 4 years ago, this program has evaluated over 100 properties and has given out 23 LakeSmart Awards. The program is free, non-regulatory, and voluntary. It also will be participating in the Build Better Buffers program. If you would like to have your property evaluated next season, contact Ron at: director.tlea@gmail.com.

Build Better Buffers

As mentioned previously, our LakeSmart and YCC programs will work with McLaughlin Gardens of South Paris to give Thompson Lake landowners resources to plant attractive and effective buffers along their property. McLaughlin Gardens is a well-respected gardening center with highly experienced horticulturists.

TLEA members who have completed a LakeSmart evaluation can request an analysis of their buffer zone from a McLaughlin horticulturist at a reduced rate. This would include:

- Collection of soil samples
- Surveying existing plants for variety and condition
- Identify areas that require build up and barriers
- Create a diagram of recommended locations and types of plantings
- One year membership to McLaughlin Gardens (10% discount on plant purchases)

The above services will be provided by Mclaughlin Gardens for a price of \$185. The landowner will have a well-designed plan to develop plantings, and if necessary, rain gardens or mulch areas.

In conjunction with this, the YCC program will offer a free, optional consultation on how to install these plantings and erosion control projects. The plantings can then be done by the landowner, through the YCC, or private landscaper.

Also, as part of our 319 Grant program, TLEA will work with McLaughlin Gardens to offer an annual Build Better Buffers workshop for Thompson Lake residents. This will be coordinated by the Androscoggin Valley Soil and Water Conservation District.

If you are interested in this program, a YCC consultation can be obtained by contacting Jim Skinner at: tlea.yccdiretor@gmail.com.

Report on Milfoil Removal 2024

Alex Bernardy, our milfoil crew chief, reports that last season they encountered a greater than expected regrowth of milfoil in the Pine Point area of the lake. On their first day of operations, they removed approximately 4 times the amount of milfoil that was present on their first day in 2023. Prior to this, the crew observed a steady decline of milfoil in this area, since the placement of benthic barriers in 2017-2021 which removed over 90% of the milfoil. Alex is sure this increased growth is a result of the mild winter and decreased ice cover, which limits the dormancy of the plant. Management of the milfoil in Pine Point is essential in preventing the spread of this invasive plant throughout the lake.

The crew removed 7 tons of milfoil this past summer, all by hand pulling. This is 3 times the amount that was removed in 2023. New colonies were found beyond the mouth of Pine Point which measured about 10 by 10 feet and were completely removed. This area will be carefully monitored next season. The good news is that the survey of the remaining coves of the lake showed either small, stable growth or a continued decline of growth of milfoil.

This report is somewhat alarming, but we should expect an increase in growth of invasive plants such as milfoil with the effects of climate change. This shows the importance of our milfoil removal efforts, and the possible need for increased funding in the future. *We will need the support of our membership to keep this program going.*

Courtesy Boat Inspection

Board member Danny Crowley reports the team had a busy summer. The crew covered the 4 launches around the lake, inspecting 1246 vessels. Fortunately, only 3 plants were found, and none were invasive. Invasive plant and animal species are an increasing threat to Maine lakes.

Invasive species, both plant and animal, are a growing threat to Maine lakes. Infestations of Zebra mussels which were initially detected in the Great Lakes, have been found in the St. John River watershed, 30 miles from the Maine border. Variable Leaf Milfoil and the even more invasive Eurasian Milfoil continue to spread throughout Maine lakes. The CBI program is crucial in educating boaters about this threat and preventing the spread of invasive species in Maine.

Many invasive species, such as Zebra Mussels, are spread through their larval form which can be harbored in bilges and live wells. Remember, *clean, drain and dry all the watercraft* when entering or leaving the water.

Membership

Membership Director Bill Booth reports that by September we have 500 renewed or new members. *Are you one of the 56 members who haven't renewed for 2024? It only takes 2 minutes to renew online at www.thompsonlake.org*

Thompson Lake Fishing Report

James Pellerin of the Maine DIFW reports they saw a rebound in the numbers and health of landlocked salmon in 2023 and this seems to be continuing into 2024. The Department resumed their typical stocking of 1,500 salmon this past spring, as their trapnet study in the fall of 2023 showed good length, weight, and condition of the resident salmon. Jim reports that the fish nets at the Oxford dam are still not fully operational, but the management seems to be better and there has been less salmon escaping the lake.

Loons and Lures

A loon in the Squirrel Island area was spotted that had swallowed a fishing lure and was initially tangled with the line. Board member Brian Bond contacted a biologist at the Biodiversity Research Institute which has been researching loons in Maine since 1994. Photos were sent and the biologist felt that the loon was recovering, the lure was stuck in the bird's throat, but they felt it should gradually pass and the loon

did not appear to be in distress. If the lure contained a lead sinker this event would be fatal. This is an important reminder that the sale of lead sinkers or jigs less than 2.5 inches long or weighing less than 1 oz. is prohibited in Maine. The use of these tackle items will be illegal starting September 1, 2026. Lead poisoning from ingested fishing tackle is the 2nd leading cause of loon deaths in Maine.

TLEA Hires an Administrator: Sarah Ferry

Because of the increasing scope and complexity of our environmental programs, TLEA decided to hire an Administrator to assist us in these efforts. We were extremely fortunate to obtain the services of Sarah Ferry, and she started in this role in early 2024. Sarah has already made a positive impact by helping to coordinate our many programs, scheduling and recording our YCC and LakeSmart evaluations, assisting with membership mailings and improving our computer system. Sarah is a resident of Casco and has a longstanding interest in the environment. She has a degree in Environmental Planning and Policy from the University of Southern Maine. An avid outdoors enthusiast, she enjoys activities such as hiking, kayaking, gardening, and foraging. Sarah states that her favorite aspect of her work with TLEA is her commitment to fostering a healthy environment within her community. Welcome to TLEA, Sarah!



Visit our website at:
www.thompsonlake.org

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