



**Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (MRWA)**

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May 19, 2022

To: Gerrish Lyon Utility Authority

cc: Dave Udy, Gerrish Township Supervisor; Julie Tatro, Lyon Township Supervisor

**To: All GLUA stakeholders located in the proposed GLUA Sewer and Wastewater Treatment Plant project area:**

On behalf of the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly, I am writing in clear support of the GLUA's proposed area-wide septic system and wastewater treatment plant facility. The watershed-level protection this would provide is in keeping with MRWA's 25-year history of protecting and restoring the entirety of the Muskegon River Watershed. We support this project first from a watershed protection perspective, but also from economic, social, and sustainability perspectives.

Accordingly, Higgins Lake, Cut River, and the proposed treatment facility are clearly located within the Muskegon River watershed – there is no legitimate scientific debate on this subject. Given its location it is the genesis of the watershed, riverine headwaters are always critically important to protect, since whatever is downstream is highly impacted, and its impacts are multiplied.

Based on direct observation as well as rigorous scientific study, it is clear that the addition of nutrients, both nitrates and phosphorous, into Higgins Lake has accelerated over the past few decades, and that mitigation action needs to be taken. By addressing the nutrient loading now, there will be benefits to the ecology of the lake and also to human health. Some residential drinking wells currently exceed drinking water standards for nitrate posing serious risk, while phosphorous levels have pushed the lake into unnatural ecological conditions. In a recent survey of the Cut River, the MRWA and partners observed the presence of insect species tolerant to high nutrient loads while not finding any species known to be intolerant to nutrient pollution. Many studies have shown how septic tanks are an input of nutrients into surface water and in the nearshore waters of Higgins Lake, and it has been well documented how nutrient concentrations are highly correlated to the number of septic tanks. Higgins Lake is not alone in this problem, many lakes in Michigan have been facing nutrient enrichment due to failing septics and the desire for manicured lawns extending to the water's edge.

From an economic perspective, our history of completed restoration projects along the watershed confirms that a comprehensive, well-engineered, and well managed sewer system both supports and increases property values, and also preserves and expands the critical, often seasonal economic draw from visitors seeking a clean water experience. Michigan lake visitors simply vote with their boats and choose to go somewhere else when a lake takes a turn for the worse. It is also notable that in no time in recent history has more federal and state funding been made available to assist in offsetting some of the costs- it is very unlikely that a "better" time will arise to make this happen. The macroeconomics of this project are highly favorable.

From a social and sustainability perspective, we observe this project as an investment on behalf of the children and grandchildren of those who own property in and around Higgins Lake. No generation looks forward to being saddled with the costs of such projects, but very few regret the decision when properties changes hands and the next generation inherits the decisions of their parents and grandparents. We encourage the GLUA and its stakeholders to look far beyond the present moment, to invest in your own future – however painful - and bring Higgins Lake back from the brink.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Scott D. Faulkner in blue ink.

Scott D. Faulkner, Executive Director  
Muskegon River Watershed Assembly

Handwritten signature of Marty Holtgren in blue ink.

Marty Holtgren, PhD  
Principal Watershed Scientist, MRWA

**From:** MRWA Director

**Sent:** Tuesday, November 16, 2021 10:54 AM

**To:** [supervisor@gerrishtownship.org](mailto:supervisor@gerrishtownship.org)

**Cc:** Marty Holtgren ([MartyHoltgren@ferris.edu](mailto:MartyHoltgren@ferris.edu)) <[MartyHoltgren@ferris.edu](mailto:MartyHoltgren@ferris.edu)>

**Subject:** MRWA Letters of Support for GLUA Project

Good morning Dave-

As we have discussed, MRWA is very supportive of a comprehensive sewer project that that restricts environmental source point contamination to Higgins Lake, and subsequently protects the extended ecosystem along the length of the Muskegon River watershed. We believe that controlling and limiting the source point of the contamination (failing septic systems) is in fact a top priority. Understanding the influx of capital into our State targeted at such improvements, we are acting on the side of speed with the attached letters of support- one to Governor Whitmer, the other to Senator VanderWall. That being said, MRWA would also appreciate having visibility to the latest proposed engineering solutions, specifically any proposed changes to the location for the treatment facility. Can you forward that on to us, please?

Finally, we are also pleased to report that MRWA is in the process of acquiring substantial funding to further our scientific understanding of the Higgins /Cut River / Deadwood Swamp components of the watershed in the coming months, which will assist in a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of the proposed GLUA project.

We will be asking both Gerrish and Lyon Townships for letters of support of this grant in the next couple of weeks. Please also bear in mind there may be a moment in the coming months where MRWA could assist the GLUA in the difficult and time consuming permitting process for this project, where we can add significant, unbiased value. Until we speak again!

Best Regards,

Scott

Scott D. Faulkner, Executive Director

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