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Gerrish-Lyon Utility Authority to receive \$1 million in federal funding

ROSCOMMON, MI: Gerrish-Lyon Utility Authority (GLUA)(glua.org) is pleased to announce that it has been awarded \$1 million in federal Community Project Funding to help support the construction of a STEP (Septic Tank Effluent Pumping) sewer system around Higgins Lake, Michigan. This funding was made possible by U.S. Congressman Jack Bergman, whose district includes Higgins Lake. According to the Congressman, “The project ... funds a critical need of the Higgins Lake Community by ensuring failing septic systems are replaced with a public sewer system.”

Higgins Lake is the only Michigan inland lake with two state parks and is visited by one million visitors each year. It is also the headwaters of the Muskegon River, which flows through nine counties before emptying into the Great Lakes.

Unfortunately, nearly 20 studies over the last 50 years, show a dramatic deterioration of water quality in the lake and in wells local homes use for drinking water. Studies have shown septic systems as the primary cause of contaminants including pharmaceuticals, PFAS/PFOS, E. coli, and excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorous.

The health, safety, and welfare of the Higgins Lake community is being compromised by contaminants leaching into the groundwater from septic systems. The Central Michigan District Health Department (CMDHD) estimates that “up to 68 percent of the 4,300 homes and businesses in the proposed service area would not meet one or more requirements of the current Sanitary Code.” The contamination is also harming the lake ecosystem. Deep water is becoming hypoxic, which fisheries experts say will make it uninhabitable for fish; as one said, if septic pollution continues, “Goodbye cold-water fish. Hello massive algae blooms.”

To protect the health of the community and the lake, Gerrish and Lyon Townships created GLUA “to plan, adopt, and manage a modern waste water treatment system.” The \$1 million in Community Project Funding is the largest grant to date received by the GLUA for the project. “We are incredibly grateful to Congressman Bergman for his support of the project,” stated GLUA Chair James Barnwell. “Receiving this funding is a major step forward in our efforts to protect the health of the community and ensure that generations to come can enjoy the beauty and recreational activities at Higgins.”

GLUA was created in 2021 by Gerrish and Lyon Townships under Michigan Public Act 233 to take timely and responsible actions to reverse the detrimental impact of past and current wastewater conditions. Its mission is to plan, adopt, and manage a modern wastewater treatment system that will protect the public health, as well as, preserve the environmental natural resources of the Higgins Lake Water Shed for generations to come.