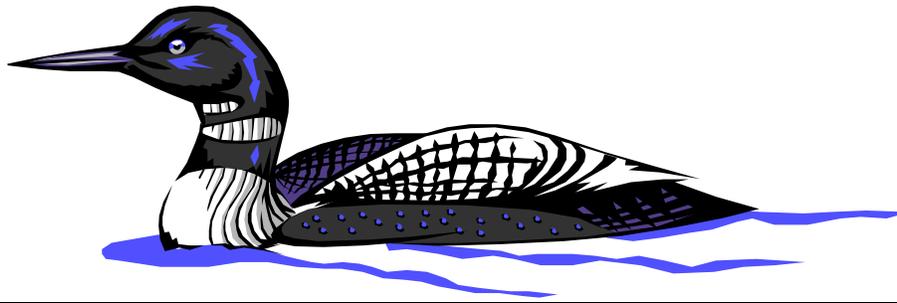

Skegemog Wildlife Area Stewardship Committee



2013 Newsletter

Well, after a rather slow start to our winter season, March seems to be trying to make up for lost time. If you have been lucky enough visit the Skegemog Wildlife area this winter, you have probably experienced some great conditions for cross country skiing or snow shoeing. With snow draped evergreen boughs bending over the trails it has been a bit of a winter wonderland.



Looking back at 2012, it was an active year in the Wildlife Area. In March 2012 we had the big snowstorm which covered our region with lots of heavy wet snow. That meant lots of branch and tree fall that had to be taken care of. Probably close to 60 trees blocked the trails making it impassable. Members of our stewardship group met the challenge and hit the trails armed with chain saws and loppers to reopen the trails. By April it was again ready for visitors to enjoy.

Then, in May we had strong thunderstorms which again brought down trees that had to be removed from the trails. One point along the trail looked as

April 2013

though a small tornado could have cleared a path through the woods. There is no real evidence to support that theory. Fortunately, it was only a small area of the woods.

Beaver business

During the summer, one of our regular pathway users reported that there was flooding near the Three Ponds area. Sure enough, a pair of beavers had dammed up a small creek and the water had risen above the level of the pathway. It was again time for the beaver busters to build a beaver deceiver in order to direct water under the beaver dam and control the water level. A week or so later, when we arrived with the necessary materials, we learned from a local hunter that the beavers had been trapped and were no longer a problem. We will monitor the area to see if new beavers move into that area.

Loon Report

As many of you may already know, in 2011 we were fortunate to have a successful birth of a loon and rearing of our first loon chick in many years. The nest was at the southeast end of Lake Skegemog and the chick was born around the end of May. We were able to observe the chick with the adults throughout the summer and we believe it migrated (hopefully south) the last week in September. The pattern for adults is to return in the spring, often to the same area, but the chicks will stay south around the Gulf of Mexico for three or four years, until they reach maturity. At that time the males return to the lake where they were

born and females disperse to new territories. Our chick was not banded so we will not know if it returns to our lake. However our adults were banded and we will be watching for their return.



In 2012, we heard and observed loons on Lake Skegemog the first week of April. Since they are territorial, we have been looking for ways to encourage other pairs to stay on our lake. At the end of March, Dale Claudepierre and Ted Ewald placed an “artificial island loon nest” or nesting platform, in a new location near the Torch River with a hope that we can entice another pair to stick around and raise a family. The nesting platform is an approved design which has been used successfully on other lakes and was originally built by our previous loon ranger, Phil Curtis. Unfortunately, we didn’t see any evidence of new loon chicks or immature loons enjoying Lake Skegemog

In 2013, we will once again be watching for the return of the loons and we will offer them a nesting platform. Thanks to Dale and Ted for their hard work along with the many volunteers who are part of the loon network. Please enjoy our loons and let us know if you see any chicks riding on an adult’s back or cruising along with an adult. If the loon makes a wing display or repeated calls, you may be too close so please back away and let them have their space.

Eagle News

In addition to the other spring storm damage we encountered in 2012, we were sad to see that the huge eagle nest at the south end of Lake Skegemog was blown to the ground presumably at the expense of any young birds that may have been living there. The good news is that the adults

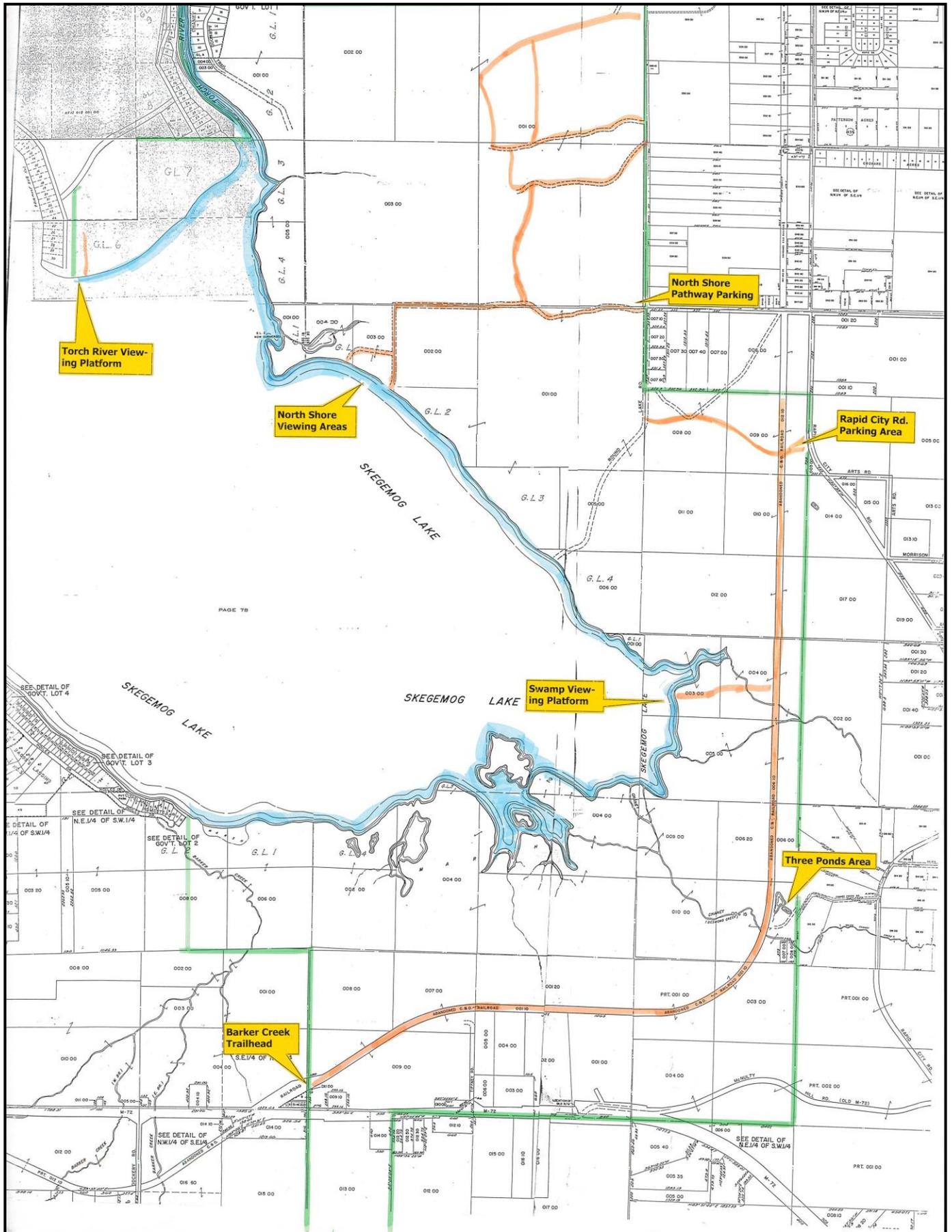
appeared to be rebuilding their nest in the fall and we hope to see new eagles this spring.

About the Skegemog Wildlife Area

As I ramble on about the wonderful things that are happening in the Skegemog Wildlife Area, I sometimes lose sight of the fact that many of the people who receive our newsletter have not had the pleasure of visiting and spending much time there. Some might not even be quite sure where it is exactly. So here is a brief overview of what’s there. Please refer to the map on the following page.

The area covers 3300 acres which is owned by the State of Michigan and protected from future development under the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy. The area extends from the mouth of the Torch River in Antrim County, all the way down the east shore of Lake Skegemog to the south shore where it abuts Hoiles Dr. in Kalkaska County. On the south, it is bounded roughly along highway M-72 on the South running between Barker Creek Nursery and Hill Rd. On the east, it extends nearly to the Rapid City Rd.

The area is mostly heavily wooded and probably 60% covered by swampland. The swamp is fed by hundreds of springs that flow into creeks and streams which are heading toward Lake Skegemog. An abandoned railroad line which used to run between Traverse City and Alden now provides a four mile pathway through the middle of the area. Additional pathways extend beyond the main rail bed. Probably the best known pathway is the boardwalk, which goes through the swamp to an elevated viewing platform. Another route is the North Shore Pathway which goes from a parking area at the intersection of Schneider Rd. and Round Lake Rd. out to the shore of Lake Skegemog. For people who like a shorter walk there is a pathway from Torch River Rd. to a wheelchair accessible platform on the Torch River. To the north of the North Shore pathway, there are additional paths through the woods which are great for hiking or cross country skiing. Whatever path you choose, you are sure to see beautiful woods and wildlife.



Skegemog Wildlife Area

Our History

Over a century ago the Skegemog Wildlife Area was mostly a wilderness traversed by a rail line. The rail line was built right through the swamp when construction equipment was still pretty crude. Amazingly, it has endured in great shape over all these years. There was an old logging town there in the lumbering years and a few foundations remain today.

In the 1980's a group of local citizens led by Harry and June Janis set about the task of acquiring privately owned holdings and transferring them to state ownership, while protecting them from future development so that they can be enjoyed by the public for generations to come.

As you enjoy the boardwalk pathway, take a moment to imagine the challenges faced by the volunteers who built it by hand, thirty years ago. They built all of that while standing knee-deep in swamp mud. What an amazing accomplishment.

What's ahead for 2013?

It seems that there is never a shortage of projects for our small, but ever growing taskforce of volunteers. Here are a few of the projects being considered which will be discussed in greater detail at our annual spring meeting on May 8th, 2013.

Dave Hauser
9240 Skegemog Point Rd.
Williamsburg, MI 49690



Skegemog Wildlife Area Stewardship Committee

1. **Spring cleanup** of winter tree-fall and branches which obstruct the pathways. That will be on **Saturday, May 18th, starting at 9 a.m. at the Rapid City Rd. turnoff.** We expect to be done by noon.
2. Continue to pursue a solution for the crumbling buildings in the Three Ponds area.
3. We also plan to clear small trees and brush that is starting to encroach on the southern portion of the main pathway.
4. We intend to prepare accurate GPS maps of the pathways and we will continue to improve markings for trails
5. Spraying for poison ivy near the sides of the pathway.
6. Our end-of-season annual picnic. The date and details are to be announced.

The Wednesday, May 8, 2013, spring meeting of the Skegemog Wildlife Stewardship committee will be held again at the Hausers' house at 9240 Skegemog Point Rd. at 7:00 p.m. We hope that you can join us for our meeting and one or more of our activities. If you have any questions or issues we can discuss, please contact me at (231) 620-5750 or dave@davehauser.net. You can also contact Dale Claudepierre at (248) 644-7614 or ginidale70@gmail.com. Or you can see us online at www.elk-skegemog.org.

Sincerely,
Dave Hauser