



Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program

IN COOPERATION WITH:
Michigan Department of Agriculture
Michigan Conservation Districts
Michigan State University Extension
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
AmeriCorps National Service

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Failing Septics: The forgotten source of nutrient pollution

With the new phosphorus fertilizer ordinances popping up in counties around the state, citizens are hoping their lakes will remain or return to their once pristine state. The problem is fertilizers are not the only source of excess nutrients in our waters; failing septic systems also release nutrients into our waters. Throughout the watershed, nutrients from septic systems are increasing as urban sprawl spreads farther than municipal sewers. These excess nutrients lead to algae blooms and rapid aging of aquatic ecosystems, not to mention the bad smells.

Proper maintenance of septic systems is crucial for the health of your family, neighbors, and the environment. A misused and neglected septic system results in disease-causing pathogens, hazardous chemicals, and nutrients such as phosphorus, nitrates, and organic waste entering the groundwater and surface water leading to human illness and polluted ecosystems.

Here are some tips to keep your septic system in tip-top shape:

- Pump it regularly – usually every five years depending on the size of your tank, how many people in your household, and how much water you use
- Let system work naturally - avoid septic system additives: starters and feeders add bacteria or encourage growth which is unnecessary in a properly functioning septic and do nothing in a malfunctioning septic, some cleaners actually harm the system by resuspending the solid waste
- Conserve water – heavy water use may not allow solid separation to occur
- Compost over using a garbage disposal – food scraps add solids to your septic tank resulting in more frequent pumps
- Flush responsibly – cigarette butts, paper towel, tampons, condoms, fertilizers, oils, and other items may clog and damage the system
- Avoid excess cleaning products – using excessive amounts of disinfectants and antibacterial cleaners (like every flush toilet cleaners) kills the bacteria decomposing your wastewater resulting in more frequent pumping (See www.wmeac.org website for Green Cleaning Fact Sheet and recipes)
- Do not drive or build anything over your drainfield – heavy machinery compacts the soil causing septic system failures
- Avoid planting deep rooted trees or shrubs in septic system area – roots can damage piping
- Divert runoff and snowmelt away from drain field – the system may flood or backup
- Keep records of your septic system to pass onto future owners

Water is catching up to oil as the world's most sought after resource. It is necessary for life, and there is a limited amount of it on Earth. *Of the 1.4 trillion liters of water on Earth, only 0.003% of it is fresh, non-frozen, accessible, and potable.* Although water availability in west Michigan is not a large concern, the quality of that water is. It is people's responsibility to keep this resource clean and safe for everyone.

Phosphorus fertilizer ordinances are one step to keeping our water healthy, but the work is not done. Other sources of excess nutrients must also be addressed. Make sure your septic system is functioning properly.

To learn more, contact Rachel Hackett, the AmeriCorps Groundwater Educator for Kent and Ottawa Counties, at the West Michigan Environmental Action Council, 616.451.3051 or at groundwater@wmeac.org. You can even sign up for a FREE and confidential one-on-one home groundwater risk assessment. Hackett is also available to give free group presentations on a number of groundwater and environmental health topics.

Vergennes Township

A Place Where People Like to Live

www.vergennestwp.org



10381 Bailey Dr., P.O. Box 208, Lowell, MI 49331

897-5671

Hours: M, W, F – 9 A.M.–3 P.M.

WINTER 2007

SUPERVISOR: TIM WITTENBACH
TREASURER: JEAN HOFFMAN
CLERK: MARI STONE
TRUSTEES: VERN NAUTA
ALLAN BAIRD

*Township Board Meetings are held the third Monday of every month at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Hall.
Planning Commission Meetings are held the first Monday of every month at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Hall.*

CLERK'S CORNER

by Mari Stone, Vergennes Township Clerk

At the Crossroad....

There is so much to talk about, I hardly know where to begin. First, I would like to wish everyone in Vergennes a peaceful holiday season. We are all so fortunate to live among such natural beauty, and along side such special people. I am thankful for the harmony on our township boards and commissions, and the staff at the township offices would like to express our thanks for all of the fine work they do. Now, on to my semi-annual ramblings.....

Wege Land – Recreation Plans

The community meeting held on October 25 at Lowell Township Hall was a great success. The planning firm of Williams & Works and the architectural firm O'Boyle, Blaylock, hired by a committee of community leaders and funded with a grant by the Lowell Area Community Fund, presented the first of their work on a community recreation assessment and feasibility study for land that is being considered for donation to the Lowell Community by Peter Wege's Economicology, LLC. Approximately 80 people from the Lowell area representing various organizations including Lowell Township, Lowell City, Vergennes Township, the YMCA, the Senior Center, and several athletic organizations came together with terrific energy to participate in the visioning process. The goal of the meeting was to explain where we were in the process, the reason for the process, and to solicit comments, concerns and ideas from the residents within the Lowell area. Each of the 9 tables participating addressed five questions relating to the recreational needs and concerns of the area. Some of the concerns regarded inconsistent fee schedules for facility usage, maintenance costs, the possibility of relocating field sports to enhance accessibility, lack of a community center/pool facility, lack of restroom facilities in some locations, the need for non-motorized trailways to connect existing and future facilities, lack of indoor activity space, and that existing facilities are not senior friendly.

Some of the suggested solutions and ideas included a new YMCA/Community Center, redeveloping existing areas and facilities for consolidation of uses that require special maintenance equipment, outdoor fitness areas, intergenerational recreation facilities, quick access activities such as parks for lunch hour walks and non-motorized commuting (trails).

Funding is always a challenge when it comes to public facilities, and a regional recreational authority to oversee maintenance and fee schedules for the active/sports facilities was suggested. Yes, the nasty "M" word (millage) was tossed out, but I feel strongly that there are many other creative strategies to be studied, and I can assure you that the three governmental units will evaluate all of them, leaving no stone unturned!

And finally, suggestions for the Wege Land? The most common idea was a community center complex which would house a pool, senior center, fitness facility, and several indoor sports. Other amenities it could include are nature areas to compliment the Wittenbach/Wege Center, Cooper Woodland Preserve, and even a senior housing facility. Overall, there was a consistent theme that it is good to view recreational needs from a regional perspective, and that working together is certainly beneficial for the community.

Lowell Area Trailway

Just because there is a new focus on recreation in general doesn't mean that the Lowell Area Trailway is taking a back seat. Quite the opposite, the community group is forging ahead with several projects. A grant application has been submitted to the Michigan Safe Walks to Schools Program to assist in the construction of the first planned stretch of paved trail from Cherry Creek Elementary to Lowell High School. Thanks to Lowell Schools Superintendent of Transportation and Facilities, Larry Mikulski, for all of his work on this. The trailway group also is performing



a campaign planning study, and will soon be asking community leadership and opinion leaders for ideas, suggestions and commitments to the trailway project. If you have an opinion (you know you do) and/or an idea for the capitol campaign, please visit the website at www.lowellareatrailway.org.

Elections

According to a Michigan Supreme Court ruling that came down just as this newsletter went to press, we will be having a Presidential Primary on January 15, 2008. The question on this decision has been in the courts for weeks. It has been quite frustrating not knowing if it was or wasn't going to happen, as there is so much that goes into the preparation for an election, and January 15th is not that far away, especially after you throw the holidays in there. You should know that there will be two ballots to choose from – one containing a Democratic slate and the other a Republican slate. Your choice will place you on a list that is available to the parties only. If you vote by absentee ballot you will also need to state which party ballot to have sent. If you think you will need an absentee ballot for this election, send me a note at the hall or an e-mail to clerk@vergennestwp.org, or give us a call at 897-5671 and we will send you an application.

There WILL be three other elections in 2008 – the May 6th election at which the school district will elect board members, the August 5th Primary for local, state and non-partisan seats, and the November 4th General Election. I still could use some additional Precinct Inspectors – several new workers signed up after my note in the summer newsletter, but I like to have extra help just in case. Also, if you know high school students who will be at least 16 by the election dates, please tell them that they are eligible as well, and they do get paid for this work. It is a wonderful experience for students, and they gain a lifelong appreciation and respect for the voting process. I always enjoy their energy and enthusiasm, especially at the end of those long 14 hour days.

High Speed Internet Connection

Yes, you read that right. Vergennes is in the process of studying the provision of high speed internet service for our residents. We have heard your pleas for help, and are seeking solutions to our problem! Discussions have been initiated with AT&T for wireless service utilizing T-1 lines. At this time, we do not know if this is cost feasible, and we need more information. One of the questions we must answer is, how many households would participate in a township sponsored service, and where are they located? Just to give you an idea of cost, we would try to stay competitive with other providers (even if they don't serve our area). That would likely be in the \$40 - \$50 a month range. If your household is interested, please send a note to Vergennes Internet Project, PO Box 208, Lowell, 49331. Include your name, home address, e-mail address, and phone number.

That's it for me. Stay warm, and dream of spring.

Mari Stone
Vergennes Township Clerk

Living in a township provides families with a number of services that match the needs of the community. Township governments are efficient, low-cost units of government accountable to the people.

The Local Touch

There are three main services that state statute requires townships provide for residents and businesses: assessing, collecting taxes and running elections.

Because of townships, assessing is done locally. That means if you have questions about your assessment you can ask someone who is familiar with your property. And if you have questions about or wish to challenge your assessment, the board of review members are residents from your community.

Because of townships, when you cast your vote in an election, you can do so at a neighborhood precinct. And, if you need an absentee ballot, your township clerk is nearby and available to assist in ensuring that you are able to vote.

Because of townships, when your tax bill is due, you can just drive down the road to drop it off at the township hall. And if you have questions about it, you can call your treasurer; instead of finding a stranger, you find a neighbor answering the phone.

Townships matter because townships are a low-cost form of government closest to the people. More than 50 percent of the state's residents live in townships. And, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, townships spend one-eighth of the amount cities do in providing services for residents.

Budget Issues Impact Local Government

Lansing is dealing with a lot of issues right now. The item getting most of the attention is the budget. With all of the problems with the state budget, some legislators feeling the pressure started pointing fingers in other directions, questioning how others were doing their jobs. Some thought that if they could move services that townships provide for residents, such as assessing, elections and tax collection as outlined in House Bill 4780, to the county that government would save money. The reality is just the opposite.

The introduction of the legislation has caused a number of people to begin to ask questions. Is bigger really better? Economists at Michigan State University decided to study this idea. Their conclusion: Moving assessing from the township level to the county level would increase the yearly cost by 10 percent.

In fact, the more people look at how townships impact the cost of local government services, the better Michigan looks. According to U.S. Department of Census information, Michigan spends 22 percent less on local government operations than the national average. That's a savings to our residents of \$3 billion a year. Townships may be one of the few things in our state that is heading us in the right direction in order to make us more competitive in the national or worldwide marketplace.

Townships keep costs down because people like you volunteer your time to staff our fire departments, or help run elections. You understand that government doesn't need to be all things to all people; sometimes it needs to focus on what is necessary and leave it at that.



DOG LICENSES



PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO KENT COUNTY TREASURER

Dog Licenses will be sold from December 1, 2007 thru March 1, 2008. Rabies vaccinations and dog licenses are required in Michigan for all dogs four months of age or older.

YOU WILL NEED:

1. **PREPRINTED APPLICATION FORM FROM THE ANIMAL SHELTER**
2. **UPDATED RABIES VACCINATION (IF NEEDED)**
3. **PROOF OF SPAYING OR NEUTERING (IF NEEDED)**

If you do not have preprinted form from the animal shelter, you must have a rabies certification and proof of neutering. Call the shelter at 336-3210 if you have any questions.

PRICES FOR 2008 DOG LICENSES:

Neutered dogs	\$ 9.00	
Un-neutered dogs	\$ 20.00	
Senior Neutered	\$ 5.00	Senior Citizens must be 62 in 2008
Senior Un-neutered	\$ 8.00	

LATE FEES

All doubled after March 1, 2008.

\$40.00 OR \$18.00 IF NEUTERED

SENIORS CITIZENS - \$16.00 OR \$10.00 IF NEUTERED

*****HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS WISH LIST*****

Request from the Kent County Animal Shelter

*New bags of dog/puppy food *New bags of Cat/kitten food *Bleach
*New collars and leashes

*Laundry detergent *Brushes and pet shampoo *New Holiday
Volunteers

*New or gently used blankets & towels *New dog or cat treats (bring them in personally and hand them out to the animals) *Pet store gift certificates *Pet toys (new or gently used)

*****PLEASE CALL AHEAD 616-336-2421*****



WINTER TAX 2007



Taxes are due Wednesday February 14, 2008.

IMPORTANT: Please mail early.

Postmarks are not accepted for due date!! We are not responsible for delays in the postal system.

Please use the return envelope provided with your tax statements

Payments received after due date that do not include the correct amount of interest, will be applied as a partial payment. State law prohibits the township from waiving these charges. A 1% penalty will be added February 15th -February 28th. March 1, 2008 all taxes are turned over delinquent to the county. Until then, you may pay both 2007 summer and winter at the township hall.

I would encourage each property owner to read and review his or her tax bill for accuracy. Is your homestead exemption up to date? Is your name and address correct?

You are responsible for the taxes even though you might not receive your tax bill in the mail due to an incorrect address. Please call for any changes that need to be made.

Make checks payable to: Vergennes Township Treasurer.

Please do not include dog licenses in the same check.



CHAMPION TREE CONTEST CONCLUDES



Winners of the Champion Tree Contest between Vergennes and Ada township, which ran from Arbor Day in April until September 30, were announced October 13 at Lowell Fairgrounds. Fifty-nine huge old trees of at least 18 species were nominated.

The overall winner, from Ada township, was a 340" willow on Todd Hart's property on Crancreek road, near Honey Creek. Hart said the prior landowner, a Mr. Watson, planted the willow in 1955. However, bragging rights were also given to the total girth of the top five trees in each township. That race was won by Vergennes, with 1,163 girth inches! Trees were measured by the contest judges, Tom Rooks of Rooks Landscaping, and Brian McKenzie, an arborist for Bartlett Tree Service.

As Mac McPherson, the Vergennes resident who conceived the idea for the contest, said in comments to 25 people gathered at the announcement ceremony, "the purpose of this contest is to remind the community of the value of great old trees.....Great old trees add grace, intrigue, beauty, economic value and a sense of peace and quiet for the families that live here even in the midst of a very busy lifestyle."

The top five trees in Vergennes were:

- 296" willow (Rob Crook), on Heim near Fallasburg
- 248" willow (Mike & Molly Johnson), on Lincoln Lake near Heim
- 235" white oak (Jerold Richmond), on Biggs
- 195" sugar maple (Cindy Luehrs), on Finn near Two Mile
- 189" black locust (Odell Farms), on Bailey near Parnell.

In addition to the five largest trees, honorable mentions were given to the largest of the following species in Vergennes Township:

- American beech, 102" (Bill Schreur)
- Burr oak, 188" (Vern & Gay Nauta)
- Cottonwood, 175.5" (Pniewski Farm)
- Honey locust, 94" (Dave and Heather Strejc)
- Horse chestnut, 75" (Odell Farms)
- Norway maple, 126" (Odell Farms)
- Red oak, 184" (Odell Farms)
- Silver Maple, 177" (Odell Farms)
- Swamp oak, 170" (Odell Farms)

The contest was initiated jointly by the Open Space Committee for Vergennes Township and members of the Ada Open Space Committee. Organic cotton t-shirts from Clothing Matters (www.clothingmatters.net), Eastown's earth-friendly clothing store, were donated for the first 25 entries to the contest.

The contest got people outdoors, looking at the big trees still growing in the community. Many have been around since before most of us relative newcomers arrived! As McPherson said, "At some point, Ada and Vergennes will become more densely populated. Spare the trees as we grow. Even in a highly populated community, old trees can be respected and left standing."

