



FoCL

Friends of Clam Lake

Spring 2021

www.friendsofclamlake.com

President's message

By Fred Sittel

Optimism expressed in last spring's newsletter about soon returning to normal was misplaced. However, by the time this summer rolls around we may actually be putting most Covid restrictions behind us! Other than that, last summer was a terrific time to be at Clam Lake. Outside of a rainy week in mid-July, the weather was really nice. And apparently, many of us put off traveling to far away summer destinations and spent most of our time in Northern Michigan at the lake cottage. Our annual boat count was an indication of this trend, one which likely will continue this summer.

During the third week of March, loons were some of the first to arrive back at the lake this year. The artificial nesting island (ANI) and advisory buoys were once again placed at the east end of the lake. The loons began sitting on a pair of eggs on May 12th, which is a chore that will last for around thirty days. The buoys, which were purchased by FoCL more than eight years ago, required new decals this season to replace original markings that were badly faded. By mid-April, sandhill cranes, Canada geese and a wide variety of waterfowl joined the loons and quite a few eagles and mute swans which managed to stay around throughout the winter months.



As we approach the always busy 4th of July weekend, more people on the lake and a busy summer season means boaters need to be extra mindful of nature and for safety's sake, each other. Hopefully by then we'll have a pair of loon chicks roaming the lake, so it's important watercraft operators realize young loons cannot yet dive underwater to avoid fast moving PWC's or boats.

Not all the activity since last summer has been on the water. There is an increased pace of construction in the lakefront residential zone, an ongoing permit application for planned improvement of an existing boat dockage and storage operation in the commercial zone along Clam River, and who knows what else the future might bring. I recently received a phone call from one concerned riparian property owner over how close to the water's edge some new construction is. We love being up-north to take a break from urban life in our own unique ways and maybe this is the time to begin a community dialog about what a vision for Clam Lake's future looks like. If you have any thoughts on this, please let us know either by email or with your comments on the membership application enclosed.

Friends of Clam Lake remains focused on protecting and preserving the environment of Clam Lake, boating safety, and the open navigation of the public waterway. Your board of directors interact with area Townships, local groups including Grass River Natural Area and Three Lakes Association, and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), formerly the DEQ. We update members on FoCL's activities, threats to water quality such as invasive aquatic species, best practices for riparian owners, local permitting requests, and zoning regulation challenges and changes in the lakefront residential zone. This is done by e-mail, our newsletters and at our annual member meeting which will be held on August 21st this year. Details for this event will be sent out mid-summer.

Just like other organizations, the people on FoCL's board change from time to time. When that happens, we depend on members like you to step up and lend a hand. Last summer, after many years of serving, Bob Hockenberger decided it was time to step down. Later in this newsletter you will hear from Cottie Volle, our longtime membership chair, who like Bob decided it's time for someone new to bring their insights and energy to guide FoCL into the future. **Please consider joining the board this year!** With your participation, FoCL can continue as the only organization dedicated to Clam Lake and its environment. If you are interested in serving on the board of directors, please contact any board member or call me at (231) 377-7818.

Special Message from FoCL's Membership Chair

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your wonderful co-operation in returning your memberships in a timely fashion! Since I will be retiring from the FOCL Board at the end of this summer, I ask that you continue your loyal support for my successor. In the years to come, we can assume that our beautiful surroundings will continue to attract more and more people. This, in turn, will place additional pressure on our environment, and require added vigilance by Friends of Clam Lake to preserve the Michigan treasures we share.

Kathleen Volle, Membership Chair

Helena Bridges or How the Chicken Crossed Clam River



For years, the Clam River emptied into Torch Lake just north of its present channel. The early settlers could easily wade through the shallow water to cross to the other side. In 1877, the tug, Jennie Silkman, dredged the river and made a new channel south of the Anderson store (aka Dockside). The dirt was used to block the old channel and the leftover dirt was put aside as an island. The Traverse Bay Progress reported that double rows of piles with stones filling the space between created a substantial breakwater at the mouth of Clam River, (Aug. 17, 1877). That allowed for the passage of many boats into Clam Lake including the "Queen of the Lakes" on Sept. 7, 1877. However, it created a new problem, how to cross the deeper river?

A road was built along the east shore of Torch Lake going south from Eastport to Helena and another going north from Kalkaska county, through Spencer Creek (Alden) to Helena. To get a horse and wagon from one side of Helena to the other side of Clam River, one had to travel two miles east and take the Clam Lake Ferry across, (Site of the DNR ramp - the ferry pilings are still visible underwater off the south shore of Clam Lake). The solution was to build a bridge over Clam River. The Traverse City Progress on June 6, 1879 reported on the building of the bridge, *"The bridge across Clam River is rapidly approaching completion, under the efficient management of Messrs. Enoch Wood and W. M. Dewy, at this writing. The bents are all up on the north side of the river and work begun on the south side. This bridge will complete the opening of the Lake Shore Road, extending from Eastport along the east shore of Torch Lake to Kalkaska County, giving to the traveling public, a road without hills, nearly the whole length of Antrim County."*

Friends of Clam Lake

P. O. Box 173, Alden MI 49612

Officers

President: Fred Sittel
 Vice-President: Open
 Secretary: Paul Sak
 Treasurer: Art Hoadley

FoCL is a member driven organization dedicated to the protection of Clam Lake and its environment for all to enjoy.

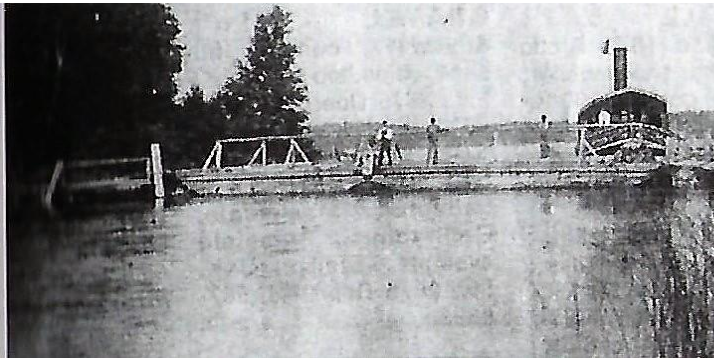
Directors at Large

Cottie Volle Jack Gartner
 Megan Raphael Todd Wilcox
 Bill Hershey

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This would have been a beautiful solution to a simple problem but while the bridge was built, the people could not agree on what kind of approaches should be made. The bridge cost \$800 and was not usable. Time passed and over five years later the County Board of Supervisors discussed the situation at their October 1884 meeting and wondered if the Clam River bridge should be replaced with a scow.

Irene Hawley Montney in her "Historical Notes on Alden and Helena Township" related what happened, "*The bridge over Clam River was high enough to allow boats access to the lake. It loomed high like a rainbow, high enough to allow the steamer, "Queen of the Lakes" to pass under. The timbers for the bridge were hewed, tongued and grooved, holes bored and fastened together with wooden pins to hold the structure firmly, then the floor of the bridge was planked. However, this bridge was never completed, as an argument arose over the right type of approaches to be built. The neighbors put ladders at each end and crossed over by climbing up one side and down the other.*"



This bridge was removed and the ferry from Clam Lake was moved to the River. The aprons on the ferry ends could be raised and lowered so teams could be driven on and off. A chain and windlass were used to move the ferry across the water. This 1874 ferry later became unsafe from decay and was replaced by a Dexter and Noble barge which reached almost from shore to shore. Approachments were built to allow for easy loading of the scow. A pulley system was used to pull the scow upstream to allow boats to pass, then it would be allowed to float back into place.

When this fell into disrepair a wooden swing bridge was used. The Alden Wave newspaper reported July 1, 1897, that "Elmer Wealch has built a passenger and wagon ferry on the site of the old swing bridge... which

will be a great accommodation to people living on both sides of the river."



In 1905 the one hundred room Pere Marquette Hotel was opened on the shore of Torch Lake north of Clam River. Concern that a new bridge was needed to handle all the traffic, a steel bridge was constructed over Clam River by the Huston and Cleveland Bridge Company. This was a hand-operated swing bridge.



The present bridge was built in May, 1957 on a newly constructed highway east of the old swing bridge. The old swing bridge was dismantled the following year. The days of the last hand-operated swing bridge in Michigan passed into history.

Now you know "eggs-actly" **how** the chicken crossed Clam River, but **WHY** is still up for discussion.

This article contributed by Carol Hoadley of the Alden Depot Museum. For more information on the history of Clam River, Helena (aka Milton / Clam River), early settlers, businesses, boats, and more, visit the Alden Depot Museum. Open Memorial Day to Labor Day Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays 1 to 4.

Boat Capacity Study

For 11 of the past 13 years, Friends of Clam Lake (FoCL) has conducted a Boat Capacity Study for Clam Lake on the 1st or 2nd Saturday after the July 4th weekend. In 2009 and 2018, we had to cancel the study due to bad weather. Barring any bad weather again, 2021 will mark the 12th year of this endeavor.

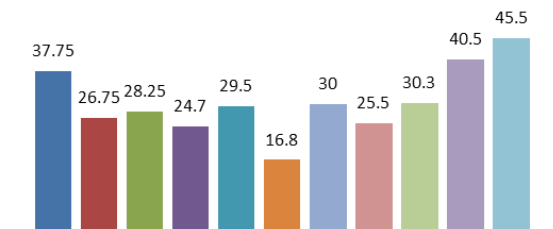
Some may ask, “Why?” The answer begins in 2007 when FoCL was being formed. There were a lot of comments during a Public Hearing conducted by the Michigan DEQ (now known as EGLE). Many comments about the number of boats using the lake were deemed “anecdotal”, i.e. *(of an account) not necessarily true or reliable, because based on personal accounts rather than facts or research.* So how do you counter this? You deal with “facts or research”. Thus, the Boat Capacity Study was started.

The study consists of 4 metrics:

- Average Boat Loading: How many actual boats are on Clam Lake at any one time?

Average Boat Loading

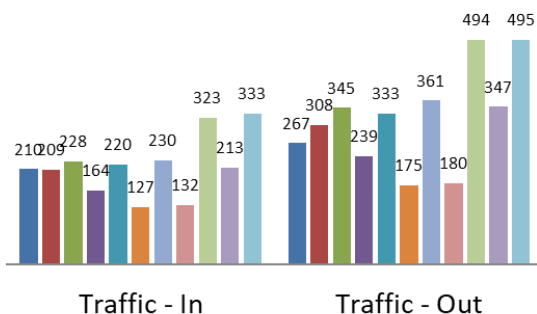
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- Boat Traffic In/Out of Clam Lake at Clam River: How many and what type of boats?

Boat Traffic @ Clam River

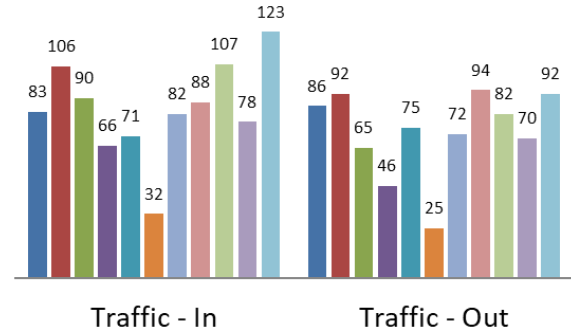
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 ■ 2015 ■ 2016 ■ 2017 ■ 2019 ■ 2020



- Boat Traffic In/Out of Clam Lake at Grass River: How many and what type of boats?

Boat Traffic @ Grass River

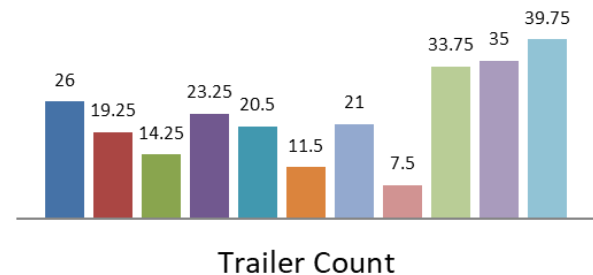
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 ■ 2015 ■ 2016 ■ 2017 ■ 2019 ■ 2020



- DNR Boat Launch Activity: How many boat trailers at the DNR site at any one time?

DNR Boat Launch - Trailers

■ 2008 ■ 2010 ■ 2011 ■ 2012 ■ 2013 ■ 2014
 ■ 2015 ■ 2016 ■ 2017 ■ 2019 ■ 2020



For the full results from 2020, like temperature and wind velocity, check out FoCL’s website: www.friendsofclamlake.com. You might also be interested in the types of boats (runabouts, off-shore, fishing, pontoons, non-motorized) that use Clam Lake and the changes since 2008.

Reminder to Mark Your Calendar

Friends of Clam Lake

Annual Meeting

Saturday, August 21, 2021

Details will be sent via email in July