

Completion Report for Gerrish Township

Higgins Lake Common Merganser Harassment Program April 8 –May 22, 2015

May 22, 2015

Project goal was to reduce Common merganser (CM) presence on Higgins Lake, Gerrish and Beaver Creek Township area through the use of harassment and limited supportive lethal take. No harassment occurred in Lyon Township from the west boundary of the DNR North State Park to the boundary at Town Line road.

Harassment:

Harassment protocol involved daily boating of the lake using boat activity and pyrotechnics to move CM off the lake. Staff training included area geography, pyrotechnics, riparian/public considerations and project social concerns. First CM observations were on April 8, 2015 (Figure 1.) with 7 CM noted at Gerrish Township Park and 2 CM near the dam. CM harassment efforts were initiated on April 8, 2015 with the lake ice covered and limited areas of open water near the shoreline. Pyrotechnics were used to drive the birds from the lake. Warm temperatures and heavy winds on April 18, created extensive openings in the ice pack enabling boats to be launched in the north end of the lake, Detroit Point, and Flag point. Seventy five CM were counted that day during harassment activities. Total ice out was on April 22, 2015 with peak numbers noted on April 24 with 89 CM counted. Harassment efforts were increased for the next few days resulting in a continual decline in CM numbers. Low CM numbers (around 10 CM per day) continued through the completion of the harassment effort on May 22, 2015. Areas of high CM concentration were found near North State Park, Lakeside, Cottage Grove, Pine Woods Camp, Gerrish Township Park, Almeda Beach, Surfside, and Treasure Island.

Lethal Take:

Lethal harvest was included to support and reinforce harassment efforts. Extensive training of staff was conducted throughout the entire project to develop a field flight identification technique for CM. This field identification technique was based on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service publication "*Species, Age and Sex Identification of Ducks Using Wing Plumage*", written by Samuel M. Carney, United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, 1992. Daily observation were made of CM and other waterfowl in flight. These observations included size, general coloration, wing coloration, flight configuration and pattern. Lethal harvest activities were initiated on April 30, 2015 only after staff had confidence in accurate CM identification. All staff was instructed to take only positively identified CM. Northpoint staff solely conducted all lethal and harassment activities and were supported by Frank Homola Gerrish township. No volunteers were allowed to participate due to our stringent training and safety requirements. Roscommon County Central Dispatch was notified at the start of harassment and the start of each lethal take.

Initial lethal harvest was directed at both sexes of CM due to the uncertainty in difficulty in taking CM. It was quickly noted that harvest would be easier than anticipated, therefore harvest was directed at hen CM to maximize the potential reduction in CM brood production from Higgins Lake.

Lethal harvest activities started on April 30th and concluded May 20, 2015 (Table 1.). Fourteen CM were harvested on April 30, 4CM were harvested on May 4, 4 CM were harvested on May 6, 0 CM were harvested on May 7, 1 CM was harvested on May 12, and 2 CM were harvested on May 20. Two CM were counted as part of the total harvest but not retrieved. On April 30, 2015 one adult male CM was shot and dove underwater and on May 4, 2014 and adult female CM was shot and dove underwater. Neither of these were retrieved after an extensive search. All 23 harvested and retrieved CM were provided to Scicon, either picked up personally, dropped off at their dock or left for pickup at the Gerrish Township Marina. All activities concluded on May 22, 2015.

Project Staff:

Steven P. Sendek, Northpoint Fisheries Management, LLC Owner and Project Manager. Fisheries Biologist with 46 years waterfowl hunting experience in Michigan and North Dakota.

Dr. Mark Luttenton, PhD. Professor of Biology and Aquatic Sciences, Grand Valley State University with 44 years of waterfowl experience in Michigan.

James Andersen, PhD & Brigadier General, Michigan National Guard ret. with 50 years of waterfowl hunting experience in Michigan and North Dakota.

Michael McNamara, MS & Lt Colonel, Michigan National Guard ret. with 20 years of waterfowl hunting experience in Michigan, North Dakota and Ohio.

Steven S.J. Sendek, student Fisheries and Wildlife, Lake Superior State University with 16 years of waterfowl hunting experience in Michigan and North Dakota.

Nicholas J. Sendek, student Mechanical Engineering, Ferris State University with 13 years of waterfowl hunting experience.

Submitted by:

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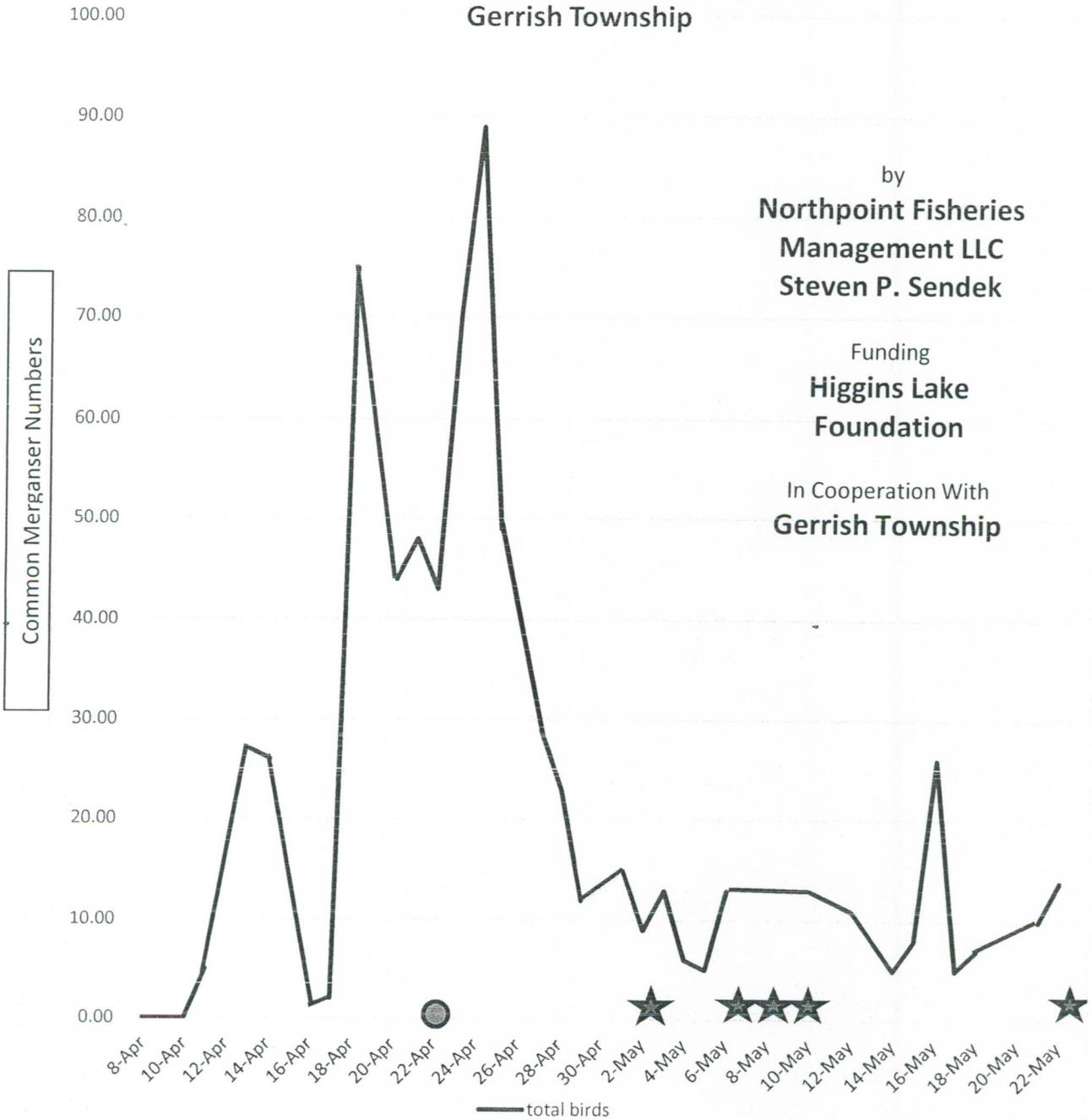
Table 1. Common Merganser Counts for Higgins Lake, Gerrish Township, and Beaver Creek Township

Spring 2015

| | | |
|--------|------|-------------|
| 8-Apr | 9CM | |
| 9-Apr | 0CM | |
| 10-Apr | 0CM | |
| 11-Apr | 5CM | |
| 12-Apr | | |
| 13-Apr | 27CM | |
| 14-Apr | 26CM | |
| 15-Apr | | |
| 16-Apr | 0CM | |
| 17-Apr | 2CM | |
| 18-Apr | 75CM | |
| 19-Apr | | |
| 20-Apr | 44CM | |
| 21-Apr | 48CM | ice out |
| 22-Apr | 43CM | |
| 23-Apr | 70CM | |
| 24-Apr | 89CM | |
| 25-Apr | 49CM | |
| 26-Apr | | |
| 27-Apr | 29CM | |
| 28-Apr | 23CM | |
| 29-Apr | 12CM | |
| 30-Apr | | Lethal take |
| 1-May | 15CM | |
| 2-May | 9CM | |
| 3-May | 13CM | |
| 4-May | 6CM | |
| 5-May | 5CM | |
| 6-May | 13CM | |
| 7-May | | Lethal take |
| 8-May | 25CM | |
| 9-May | | |
| 10-May | 13CM | |
| 11-May | 12CM | |
| 12-May | | Lethal take |
| 13-May | 8CM | |
| 14-May | 5CM | |
| 15-May | 8CM | |
| 16-May | 26CM | |
| 17-May | 5CM | |
| 18-May | 7CM | |
| 19-May | | |
| 20-May | | Lethal take |
| 21-May | 10CM | |
| 22-May | 14CM | |

Figure 1.

Common Merganser Numbers on Higgins Lake Spring 2015 Gerrish Township



Dates Harassment and Lethal Take Took Place

Lethal Take Days = ★

Ice Out = ●