



Diving In

A Lake Level Update

*From Leslie Meyers,
Antrim County Drain Commissioner
Volume 1, Issue 3
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Known issues in the Elk Rapids Chain of Lakes Watershed include the Elk Rapids Hydrodam Overflow Spillway, the Bellaire Dam, the Ellsworth Bridge Street culvert, and numerous sedimentation issues. There is no existing revenue source that will cover the costs of these important and expensive

repairs. Creating and implementing special assessment districts will provide the necessary revenue. As that creation and implementation is a long and complicated process, this newsletter is being released monthly to provide information to all interested parties.

County Actions to Date

The Elk Rapids-Chain of Lakes Watershed spans four counties:

- Antrim
- Charlevoix
- Grand Traverse
- Kalkaska



The Antrim County and Kalkaska County Boards of Commissioners have both approved resolutions affirming that the Antrim County Drain Commissioner has the authority to manage the lake levels. Leslie Meyers, Antrim County Drain Commissioner, is currently working with the Charlevoix and Grand Traverse County Boards for similar resolutions.



Charlevoix County. On December 10, the Charlevoix County Board discussed the resolution. Ms. Meyers attended the meeting and responded to the many questions the Board asked. Though no motion was made, Ms. Meyers was directed to provide additional information about the resolution and

the special assessment district (SAD) to County Administration. Charlevoix County has mailed survey questions to their property owners who would be impacted by the SAD. The deadline for responding to the survey is December 23. It is anticipated that the Charlevoix County Board will consider the resolution in January 2026.

Grand Traverse County (GTC). Ms. Meyers presented to the GTC Board of Commissioners on December 17. The Board approved a motion to have GTC administration make minor changes to the resolution and bring it back to the GTC Board's January 7, 2026 regular meeting. In addition, the GTC Board respectfully requested that the GTC Drain Commissioner review the resolution.



Once all four resolutions are in place, Ms. Meyers will take the necessary steps with the Circuit Court to update the lake level orders and confirm the special assessment district boundaries.

Determining Per Parcel Costs

Due to two different active circuit court orders impacting the Chain of Lakes, two distinct and separate Special Assessment Districts (SADs) must be created, the Lower Chain of Lakes SAD and the Upper Chain of Lakes SAD.

Final parcel costs cannot be determined until both SADs are set by the Circuit Court. This will us how many parcels are included in each SAD

and which specific parcels those are. Once the SADs are set, we will move forward with:

- Completing design for each project
- Obtaining bids and preparing cost estimates
- Preparing an assessment methodology

The per parcel cost is dependent on obtaining resolutions from all four counties, Circuit Court hearing dates, and design completion.

Project Summaries

Lower Chain: Elk Rapids Hydrodam

The Hydrodam's main function is controlling lake levels. A 2023 report states that the overflow spillway at the Elk Rapids Hydrodam is more than 100 years old and needs extensive repairs. On the upstream side, the roadway and sidewalk above the spillway are experiencing significant settlement. On the downstream end, the headwall is being undercut and is in poor condition. In addition, engineers have recently noted that a wall extension under the Dexter bridge may be necessary.

Upper Chain: Bellaire Dam

Though a 2024 inspection report noted that the Bellaire Dam is in fair condition, a 2023 engineering study noted that the dam would overtop its banks if a 100-year flood event fell on the Upper Chain. The study also determined that the dam does not have the capacity required by EGLE for a high hazard dam. In addition, parts of the dam have exceeded their design life and need rehabilitation or replacement.

Upper Chain: Ellsworth's Bridge Street Culvert

The early 1970s culvert is significantly undersized. This directly impacts water flowing to the rest of the Upper Chain of Lakes and the entire Lower Chain. A significant snow and rain event in early 2025 resulted in water overtopping Bridge Street. Replacing this culvert with an appropriately sized culvert is needed.



Upper Chain: Sedimentation Issues

Numerous sedimentation issues have plagued the Upper Chain for many years. Ms. Meyers is working with engineers and State of Michigan regulatory agencies to determine how much, where, and when to perform dredging.

Developing Costs

Engineers with extensive dam renovation and construction experience have been hired to provide the best solutions for these specialized projects. Finalized costs can only be determined after construction drawings are complete.

Lower Chain: Elk Rapids Hydrodam

Preliminary costs are expected to be provided in late December or early January.

Upper Chain: Bellaire Dam

Engineering final design indicates a 2026 construction cost of \$6.2 million.

Upper Chain: Ellsworth's Bridge Street Culvert

A preliminary report provides cost options ranging from \$1.15 million for a new three-sided culvert to \$2.225 million for a new steel bridge. The costs of construction, along with the cost of ongoing maintenance, will factor into the decision.

Upper Chain: Sedimentation Issues

Though costs are not yet available, Ms. Meyers is reviewing grant possibilities and other possible revenue sources with the Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay and the Conservation Resource Alliance. Any alternative revenues will reduce taxpayer costs.

More Information


The two previous issues of *Diving In* are available online at TinyUrl.com/ACDrainComm.

The October 2025 issue is an overview; the November 2025 issue provides in-depth information about the creation and implementation of Special Assessment Districts.

Ms. Meyers, Antrim County Drain Commissioner, would be pleased to present to groups large and small. Contact her at **231-533-3633** or meyersl@antrimcountymi.gov.



For more information:

 231-533-3633

 TinyUrl.com/ACDrainComm

Look for Monthly Updates!