

TIPS FOR STARTING A BOAT WASH

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Adding a boat wash is a great idea to help keep Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels, and other invasive aquatic species at bay, but how do you do it? Several people involved in successful, but very different boat washes on Michigan inland lakes shared what they have learned through their own experiences.



Set along the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Big Glen Lake (shown here) and Little Glen Lake are also close to Lake Michigan. This proximity makes them especially susceptible to invasive species that boats may transport from the Great Lakes. Photos by Leslie Mertz.

BIG AND LITTLE GLEN LAKES

Information provided by: Sarah Litch, a member of the Glen Lake Association Boat-Wash Committee.

Location: Leelanau County

Lake size: 6,300 acres (Big and Little Glen lakes combined)

Boat wash history: Begun in 1994, this is one of the longest-running boat washes in the state.

Boat wash details: This boat wash is situated at the access site for the two lakes. It includes a power washer that uses heated water, which was added to eliminate the fish pathogen known as viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) and other problem species, which have become issues in nearby Lake Michigan. Paid workers man the boat wash from 6 a.m. - 7 p.m. during the summer boating season. Instructions are posted for self-washing when the wash is not manned. As of 2015, the boat wash processes about 4,000 boats per year (including 900 kayaks) during manned hours. They do not keep track of self-washing numbers.

Education and marketing: Educational materials include educational pamphlets and signage, which are available on-site. Staff members approach boaters to provide a quick explanation about the need for washing and pass out brochures. Brochures and signage are also available when the

station is unmanned. In addition, bright orange and black signs at road ends inform boaters about the need for washing and direct them to the boat wash, and brochures are available at road ends. Besides these efforts, the Glen Lake Association promotes the boat wash in its Glen Lake Stewardship Handbook, which they distribute to lake property owners and make available on the association website (pages 42-43 of the handbook at <https://glenlakes.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/gl-cr-watershed-landowners-handbook.pdf>), as well as educational cards they distribute to rental properties.

Costs: Maintenance costs run approximately \$28,000 a year and include minor repairs to sprayers or other equipment, insurance, utilities, and staff remuneration.

Funding: The lake association is the primary supporter of the boat wash. A few small grants for the boat wash, shed, and training workshops, and a \$12,000 grant from the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians for an ungraded spraying system, and for developing educational pamphlets and signage have also come in handy.

Sarah Litch's Tips:

➔ If you are going to man a boat wash, hire adults. "We would not recommend staffing with volunteers. It's not an easy job: It's total boredom or total chaos," Litch says. "And we do not hire anybody unless they're graduated from high school – they just don't have the maturity to approach people who have big boats and tell them they're going to have to wash their boat."

➔ Train staff members to educate boat owners about the process and the reasoning behind it, and once that relationship with the boater has been established, to then begin spraying the boat.

➔ Borrow when you can. The Glen Lake Association worked with communications professionals to create some of their educational materials, and their signage. "It would be very nice if signage in particular was standardized throughout the state because then people can get used to seeing a certain sign and knowing what it means," Litch says. She

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The Glen Lakes boat wash is manned from 6 a.m. – 7 p.m. every day during the summer months. Here, one of the paid staff uses heated water to spray off the boat and flush the engine.

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invites anyone wishing to copy some of Glen Lake's materials or to get more information about their boat-wash operation to contact her at sarahlitch@gmail.com.

PARADISE LAKE

Information provided by: Kira Davis, who served as a key organizer for the boat wash in her previous position as water quality specialist for the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (she is now program coordinator for the Conservation Resource Alliance); and Catherine Freebairn, treasurer of the Paradise Lake Improvement Board.

Location: Emmet and Cheboygan Counties

Lake size: 1,900 acres

Boat wash history: The Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, the Paradise Lake Improvement Board, and the

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Michigan Department of Natural Resources collaborated on a grant proposal to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to pay for the new facility. Two years and three months later in 2012, the boat wash was up and running. "That's pretty quick with three governments involved," Davis says with a laugh.

Boat wash details:

This boat wash is situated at the access site. This is a self-operated (unheated) power washer that is available during the summer boating season. Instructions are posted.

Education and marketing: Every Saturday morning during the boating season, the Paradise Lake Association organizes volunteers to follow the guidelines of the Clean



Boaters pull up to the self-operated boat wash, read the instructions (right), and in a matter of minutes are done and ready to launch into

Paradise Lake. Images courtesy of Kira Davis.



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Higgins Lake State Park. The boat washes at the North and South parks were built on state land, and therefore required a close collaboration with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Boat wash details: The North Higgins Lake State Park boat wash is not on the lake, but is a minute's drive down the road from the boat launch. The boat washes at the marina and at South Higgins Lake State Park are located at the boat-launch sites. All are self-operated (unheated) power washers that are available during the summer boating season. Instructions are posted.

Education and marketing: The Higgins Lake Foundation's newsletter promotes the boat washes and also provides educational signage on-site, as well as blue and yellow road signs to direct boaters to the North location. "In addition, there's actually a blitz statewide to promote the use of boat washes, so we get a team out (at the boat wash) a couple of days a year to meet and greet boaters, and to talk about aquatic invasive species to increase awareness," Springstead says. Besides those materials, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife provided signs about aquatic invasive species and prevention, and they are posted at different entry points around the lake, and the Higgins Lake Foundation also uses the Clean Boats Clean Waters diagram that explains proper boat-washing technique at the North site, and will add one to the South site in spring 2016.

Costs: Initial cost for the North boat wash was \$60,000, which included construction of the boat-wash facility; addition of power-spraying equipment; construction and paving of road lanes that provide simultaneous washing of two boats; installation of underground electrical service and a new water well dedicated to the boat wash; and culverts to accept runoff water from the boat wash. The initial estimate for the South boat wash was \$30,000, but that grew to \$70,000 due to added requirements made by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). "Since more and more lakes are adding more boat washes – thank goodness – the DEQ is taking a more careful look at where where that runoff water is going. That has resulted in a more elaborate process to make sure it's not going right back into the lake, and that makes sense," she says. In comparison, initial costs for the Gerrish Township marina boat wash were around \$1,000, because no major improvements were



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife provided signs about aquatic invasive species and prevention, and they are posted at different entry points around Higgins Lake. Photos by Tabitha Sutterfield.

necessary. Maintenance costs for each of the three boat washes are minimal – no more than \$500 a year for utilities and minor repair, such as replacement power-washer wands.

Funding: Higgins Lake Foundation donors are the primary funders of the boat-wash construction. "We're lucky here at Higgins that we have a lot of people who support the efforts of the foundation to preserve and protect the lake with their donations," she says. Besides donations, the foundation has an annual fundraiser to support its work. It also received grant funds for the North boat wash from the Roscommon County Community Foundation, and some additional funding from the Entrust Foundation for both the North and South state park boat washes. Maintenance costs, which typically run less than \$500 a year per site, are paid by the Higgins Lake Property Owners Association at the North site, and by the DNR at the South site.

Vicki Springstead's Tips:

➔ Try to put the boat wash at the boat-launch site. "That's the ideal situation, because it's convenient for people and it's a reminder.



The Higgins Lake Foundation worked with a local sign company and the DNR to develop the road signs that direct boaters to the North Higgins Lake boat wash.

Most people want to do the right thing. It just takes a couple of minutes and away they go," she says.

→Form good working relationships with the DNR. "Start with your local DNR representative, who may be the park ranger depending on the location of your project. That representative will then run the project up the ladder from there," she says.

→Tap the expertise of local people. An engineer, who, was a member of the Higgins Lake Foundation Board, was very helpful in drawing up the boat-wash plans.

→Start early in obtaining permits from the DEQ. Such permits take a careful look at boat-wash runoff, which may affect the exact location of the boat wash.

→Learn from others. "We get a lot of visits from other lake associations that have come to see our boat washes, and we're happy to give them a tour and explain how we did it," she says. To get more information about a tour, contact the Higgins Lake Foundation office at 989-275-9183. ●●●

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