

Dear Swimmer's Itch Committee:

It has been awhile since I communicated with you. Terry Schwartz has been an indispensable help these past few months.

First of all, I want to thank Kris LaMarche who was kind enough to take Susan Knight, (from the Trout Lake DNR Station), to collect snails on the lake last fall. Dr. Sandland, a professor at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse, tested most of the samples and did not find the schistosome that carries swimmer's itch in any of them. Dr. Sandland has been on sabbatical recently, so we have not been able to contact him further.

You may recall that Dr. Sandland confirmed that the Chinese Mystery Snail, the one we see most frequently on the bottom of the lake, is not a host. Only native snails host the schistosomes that cause swimmer's itch. Through other researchers, we discovered that often only 2% of snails can be infected and yet release enough schistosomes to cause swimmer's itch in the lake. We have learned a few other things by contacting various other experts on swimmer's itch.

The merganser is the usual waterfowl that hosts the schistosomes that cause the itch. There are at least two organizations, one in Michigan and one in Minnesota, that will come to a lake and work on relocating the mergansers. This has provided positive results in both Minnesota and Michigan, but it is a multi-year project and it takes yearly vigilance since the mergansers are migratory. The hope is that by relocating them the chicks imprint on another lake to return to in the spring. It can be a costly solution.

We thought it might be possible if we put together several lake associations in the area. The fact that there are so many lakes nearby could make relocation difficult because, again the mergansers can fly from lake to lake. This would require DNR approval, but the two organizations were willing to help us work with the DNR. Susan Knight gave me the name of a contact at the DNR. In Michigan they

put together a coalition of 20 lake associations and were even able to get some state funding.

Terry has been attempting to contact other lake associations in our area to see if they would be interested in being part of any study and/or part of finding a solution so we could share the cost. Thus far she has not heard back from any of them that she reached out to.

Most recently, we spoke with Dr. Sarah Brant and Dr. Sam Loker from the University of New Mexico. They were very informative and wanted to do their own inspection of snails from our lake to identify the exact snails and waterfowl that are the carriers. The Drs. suggested that perhaps this spring there might be some students - we suggested perhaps from Nicolet College or from UW Stevens Point - who would be willing to help do some collections for us as part of their course of study. They are also willing to come to the lake and conduct their own study to help identify the source of the problem and advise us on a possible solution. Although mergansers are the suspected culprits, even mallards could be causing a problem. They could determine this through a study of the lake. Different aquatic birds and different snails could be involved at different times of year.

Drs. Loker and Brant agree that the crayfish is a natural predator of the snails in certain stages of development and that the observed decline in the crayfish population on the lake could be a contributing factor to the increase in the itch. We e-mailed Susan Knight to ask if it would be possible for the DNR to do a crayfish study on the lake to document the population decline which has been anecdotally observed by residents. If a decline is observed, we further wonder if it would be possible to restock the lake with native crayfish, much as is done with fish. If it would work, this would be a much simpler and more natural solution than relocating the mergansers. I am waiting to hear back from Susan on this question. There are places in Wisconsin that sell native crayfish. According to Susan Knight, the DNR does not raise them.

That brings you up to date. The professors would like to do the study sometime in June or July. The organizations that do merganser relocation would like to start as soon as the ice breaks out.

Terry and I would be interested in your thoughts on this. If there is enough interest in merganser relocation, we could contact either or both businesses to get a firm price and see if other lake associations would like to work along with us on the project. The question is where the money would come from. Alternatively, we could wait until Drs. Brant and Lokar do a study of our particular lake to determine if it is just the mergansers, or other waterfowl as well. They would also try to identify the responsible snails. I think they would use this as an academic study.

The idea of restocking the lake with crayfish is another option, but it would require the approval of the DNR. Perhaps we should have the DNR do a study this spring to confirm that our anecdotal evidence of a decline in their population is accurate. At some point we should get together as a committee to discuss the options further. Would any of you be interested?

Please let us know your thoughts,

Terry and Melanie

Terry Schwarz and Melanie Rummel