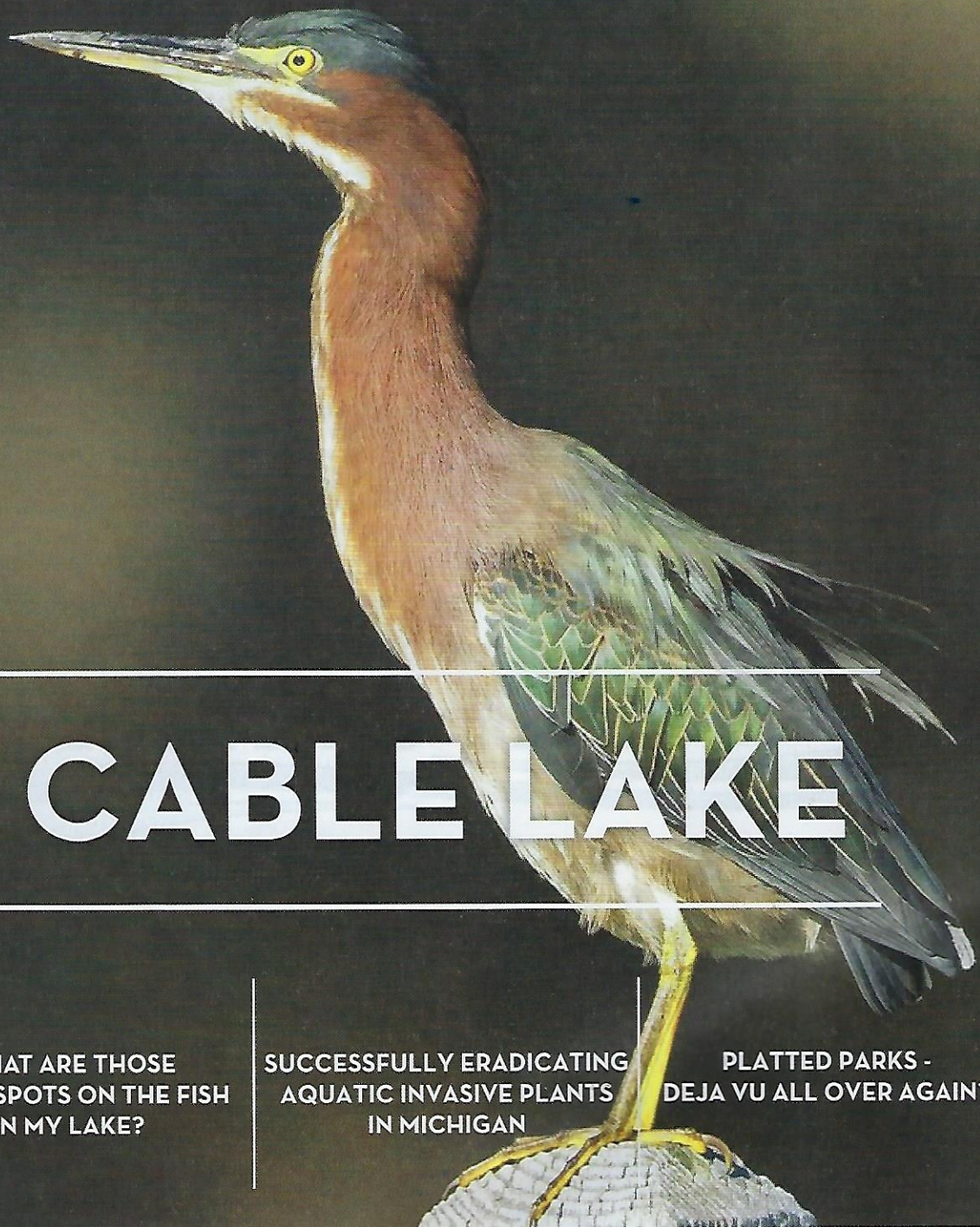


THE MICHIGAN RIPARIAN

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CABLE LAKE

WHAT ARE THOSE
BLACK SPOTS ON THE FISH
IN MY LAKE?

SUCCESSFULLY ERADICATING
AQUATIC INVASIVE PLANTS
IN MICHIGAN

PLATTED PARKS -
DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN?

CABLE LAKE

VERONNICA KENREICH | SECRETARY OF THE SILVER CREEK PLANNING COMMISSION
AND CASS COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT



In the late 1800s, people began to flock to southwest Michigan to visit, reconnect with nature, and “enjoy wellness”. This led to the emergence of lakeside resorts, and the area became a popular destination for urban and suburban dwellers alike. The area of southwest Michigan was heavily marketed to larger cities such as Chicago as a “health retreat” where visitors could enjoy hunting, fishing, and swimming in the many lakes in the region.

The early 1900s brought a building boom of countless resorts and seasonal cottages that sprung up all over area lakes. At one time there was a brisk business of ferry boats that would bring boatloads of “city folk” across Lake

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 17)



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Michigan from Chicago to vacation in southwest Michigan. Rail lines were added from Chicago to Benton Harbor, and that really changed the game in the settlement of the area. The “Inter Urban” electric rail brought vacationers from Benton Harbor to Dowagiac, as well as to the various stops in between. Resorts would then send buggies to the rail stops to pick up travelers and bring them to one of the many resorts that dotted the lake shoreline. The buggies and train cars brought loads of people ready to escape the city and enjoy the sultry summer days on any one of the beautiful lakes in southwest Michigan.

Later, as transportation became more accessible and less expensive, visits became more frequent and longer. To families that wanted to enjoy all seasons of Michigan’s great outdoors, these dwellings evolved to become more than summer-only cottages. Eventually larger homes began to replace the small seasonal dwellings, and it seems as though the small summer cottage is now a thing of the past. Today, most of the lakes are fully settled with large homes, expansive patios, solid surface sea walls, monoculture lawns, overdevelopment, and shoreline with little, if any, native vegetation.

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CABLE LAKE

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Located about seven miles outside of the city of Dowagiac, the six lakes that make up Sister Lakes have grown into a popular watersport destination. Despite exponential growth over the last few years, Cable Lake has managed to keep much of the charm of days gone by that originally made Sister Lakes such a popular vacation spot back in the day.

It is likely that the reason Cable Lake was not built up is that being a non-motorized lake, it did not have the draw that other area lakes had. Thus, there was no need to develop resorts like the surrounding lakes—and the people that live on Cable Lake like it that way. Most of the shoreline is undeveloped, and is free from hard surface sea walls. The lack of constant scouring action from the waves of motorboats has kept shoreline erosion to a minimum. Much of the lakeshore has a healthy growth of native white water lily pads that also help stabilize the shoreline. Natural shorelines are embraced by most of the riparians, as is fostering the growth of beneficial native aquatic plants. Cable Lake hosts a healthy variety of 19 native aquatic plants that are thriving in abundance

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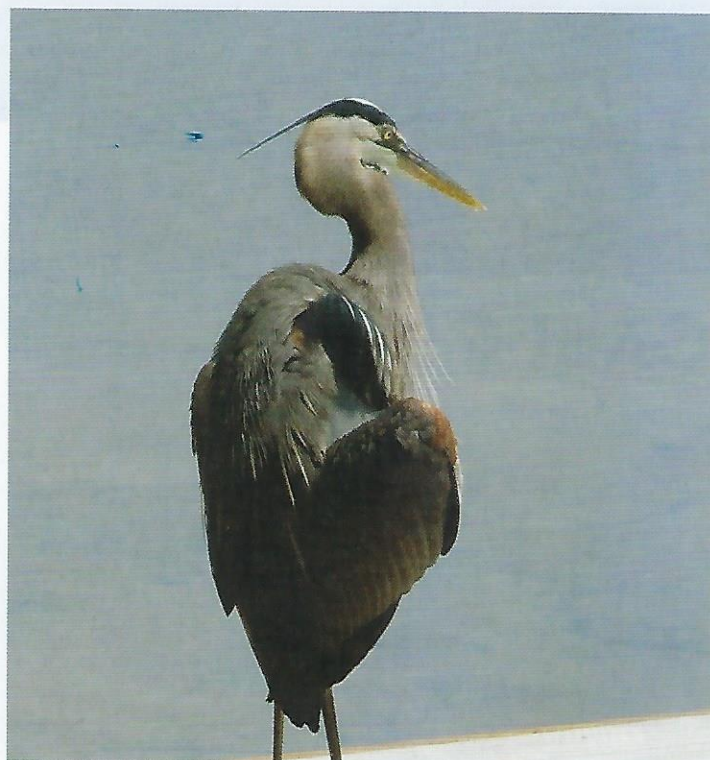


throughout the lake. One end of the lake is a wetland area of several acres that is full of a large variety of plants including spatterdock, lilies, buttonbush, cattails, swamp loosestrife, and bullrush.

These untouched acres of shallow wetlands are the lifeblood of Cable Lake. On any given day you will see snapping turtles, painted turtles, box turtles, and spiny softshell turtles of all sizes basking on sunken logs and on the banks. Other wildlife observed on the lake include deer, red fox, coyote, Michigan mink, and beavers. For the birding enthusiast, there is no shortage of birds to see that live in and visit the wetlands and lake, including bald eagles, red tailed hawks, sandhill cranes, green herons, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood-Pewee, gray catbird, great horned owl, and Cedar waxwings. It is common for great blue herons to be stalking the sandy shallows for their next meal without the disruption of boats or heavy wave action.

Much of Cable Lake is landlocked by private lands and there is no DNR access to the lake. The lack of motors allowed on the lake tends to make it more difficult to navigate with

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“Many more generations
will appreciate the
splendor of the time
capsule that is
Cable Lake.”



CABLE LAKE

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larger boats. There is little if any transfer of boats from one lake to another because there are few access sites that are not private property. That means that this lake is enjoyed by primarily resident enthusiasts of sailboats, paddle boats, and kayaks with no fear of getting run over by boats or washed out from wake boat waves. One thing that is especially unique to this lake is the paddle pontoon. This is a full-size pontoon boat that is outfitted with a paddle boat mechanism. Two people can pedal and steer these floating party barges around the scenic lake with no worries of heavy motorized boat traffic. On summer days you can see the numerous pontoon boats skirting the shoreline loaded with families enjoying the long, lazy days in the sun. On weekends at the lake, you will see scores of people floating all over the lake with foam noodles, blow-up rafts, and floating loungers without a care of crossing the path of a motorized boat.

What is most interesting is what this lake does not have (besides motors). Surveys over several years have not found any of the common aquatic invasive plant species,



specifically Eurasian watermilfoil and curly-leaf pondweed. In theory, there are many ways these aquatic invaders infiltrate a waterway; however, the most common way of transferring invasive plants is through unclean boats and recreational equipment. The neighboring all-sport lakes in the area do have DNR launches; they also have Special Assessment Districts to manage and treat invasive aquatic plants to keep

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them from spreading. This is especially important in all-sport lakes. Eurasian watermilfoil must be treated before boating traffic shreds it with their props, as this aquatic plant spreads via fragmentation. The lack of access to Cable Lake appears to be the key to keeping these invasive plants at bay. However, there are some invasive plants in Cable Lake. Present in moderation are purple loosestrife, Phragmites, and Brasenias.

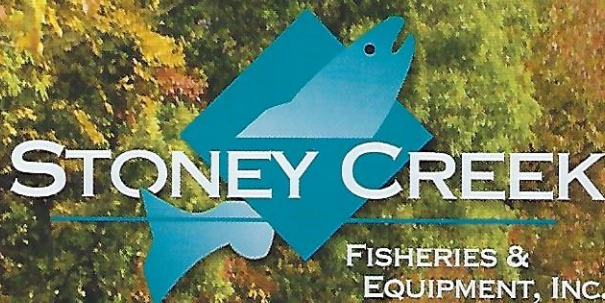
The fishery on Cable Lake is healthy and diverse with a variety of panfish such as bluegill, largemouth bass, black crappie, and sunfish. There are also reports of monster northern pike in Cable Lake. With a max depth of 41 feet, there are two deep areas in the lake along with gentle slopes that have lots of woody structures that healthy fisheries favor. In the spring, the shoreline shallows are abundant with bedding fish indicating that the fishery remains healthy in this idyllic setting. Without the disruption of boating traffic, fishing is always reported to be good on Cable Lake.



E. Root Fitch Memorial Day camp is a nonprofit organization on the lake that has been in existence since 1941 and was created so the kids from the City of Dowagiac could come and experience the lakes and outdoor activities. The original cost to attend was 15 cents; today the cost for Dowagiac kids in grades 2 through 6 is only \$1 a day to attend the 3-week camp. Activities at the day camp include arts and crafts, sports, and of course, swimming. This sprawling camp boasts 1,000 feet of natural shoreline and during summer when the camp is in session, you will hear the excited voices of the countless kids that get to enjoy the lake while learning to swim, fish, and experience the great outdoors in a setting that has been largely untouched for decades.

Residents and visitors alike speak of the "healing waters of Cable Lake". Countless generations of families that visit will attest to how "a day at the lake is worth a month in the city". This unique setting is a welcome holdout to big development and now enjoys a cult-like following of people that want to be on the lake specifically because it does not have motorized boating traffic or busy boat launches. Recent popularity of non-motorized water recreation has given new life to this little slice of heaven that is so cherished by its residents. You can bet there will be many more generations that will appreciate the splendor of the time capsule that is Cable Lake. R.

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