Emmet County Lakeshore Association

Summer 2012 Newsletter

Contributors for the articles are: Gary Rentrop, Rob Deane, Franz Neubrecht, Kimberly Dowd and Dick Selvala.

What's in a View?

By Ben Veling, BCMAI

Part of the allure of living in northern Michigan is being so close to all the water. Many of the more picturesque homes in the area come with a view of the water. These views can often be an asset to the lot or a selling point for perspective buyers. In fact there have been many instances where parties have ended up in court to argue about who is entitled to a view and how much.

Aside from all of that having a view is like having a pet, it will change over time and maybe not the way you want. Periodic maintenance is required if you would like to keep the existing view. The question that I am commonly asked to answer is 'how should we maintain our view?'. The answer I give is complex, but I will try to cover the basics in this article.

The problems with views arise when trees and forests do what they have always done: they grow. This growth will eventually block out the line of sight to the water. Forests are driven to gather light energy and use it to produce new plant tissue. Creating openings in the forest just promotes a plant growing in the shade to grow into the new openings. Often the response to this is to start cutting until the view is restored to how we remember it. The problem with this is that this may be more expensive, create hazards or even change the ecosystem in ways that do not promote the future aesthetics that are desired.

The old stand by for view management was to cut the trees just below the line of sight. This process, called topping, is now known to be one of the worst things that you can do to a forest. Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should. Topping creates trees that grow at irregular rates. The trees require tops to grow and thrive, so when the tops are removed the trees respond by trying to grow their tops back very quickly. Research has shown that growth is two to ten times faster in trees that have been topped. This means that the view is lost much quicker than with other methods of management.

Topping cuts promote the dense, spreading canopies. These canopies choke out undergrowth and healthy plants growing below. In areas with slopes this increases the chances for erosion. Without light to promote replacement trees, the only trees that may remain after severe topping are topped trees.

The topping cuts also leave large areas of the tree open to decay, which is not easily contained by the tree like other types of pruning or natural limb loss would be. The result is that topped trees are many times more likely to fail. If these trees are close to a dwelling or property boundary, liability is the result.

Topping also favors certain types of trees. Trees that have rapid growth characteristics like willow (Salix), box elder (Acer negundo), basswood (Tilia americana) and some of the poplar species (Populus) will tolerate topping much better than slower grow trees like sugar maple (Acer saccharum) and red oak (Quercus rubra). This is because the fast growing plants expend very little resources trying to defend against decay. The slow growing species not only try to re-grow their tops, but also produce copious amounts of defensive chemicals to survive. The faster growing species soon overtake the slower growing species. This also promotes fast growing trees that have severe decay in their stems, which is why they become hazardous.

The final thing to consider about topping is cost. Removing just the top of the tree takes a whole lot more effort and/or equipment than simply felling the tree. Eventually the end result is the same: the tree dies. I have seen proposals where a company offered to top a view and their bid was less than proper management, but that same company will charge less to cut the tree down than to top it. Add to this the fact that you will have to top those same trees many times to get the same effect as removing them once and there is no comparison to cost over the long term: topping costs much more.

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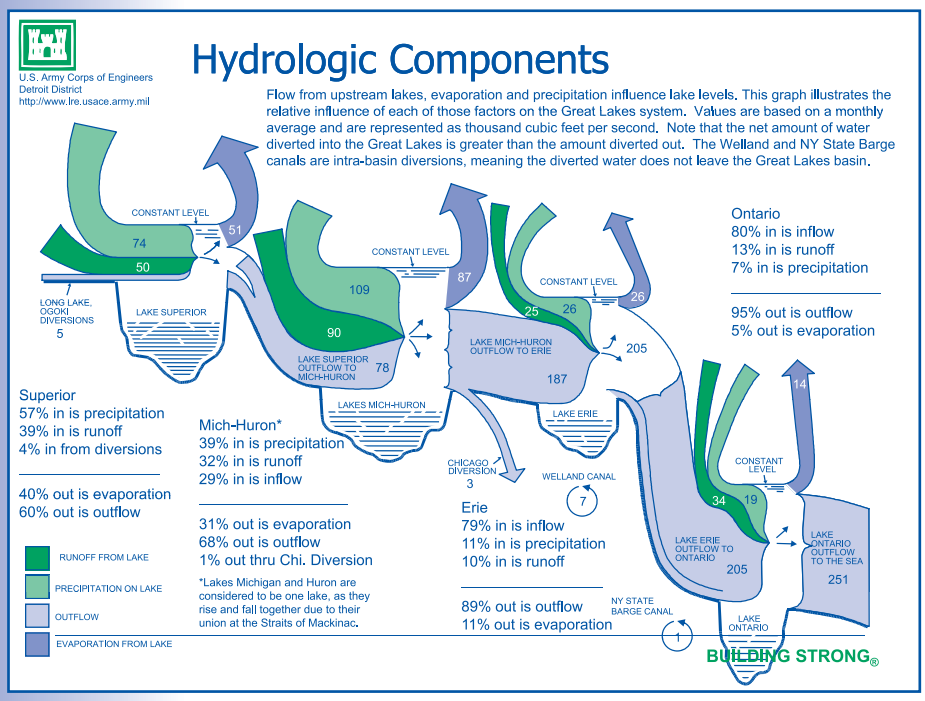

Great Lakes Hydrologic Components

2012 Zoo-de-Mac M-119 Bike Event Much Better

In past years there have been numerous complaints about the Zoo-de-Mach Bike event. These complaint included blocking motor vehicles form the use of M-119, urination on the road side, excessive drinking, rude and unacceptable behavior. Through the effort of the Heritage Highway Committee and ECLA representative the promoter of the event was engage along with the Michigan State Police. It was concluded that the 2012 event held in May was much better. The event was well patrolled by both the State Police as well as the Sheriff. For the most part there was compliance with the single file requirement, even the "Mail Lady" said things were much better. Our thanks to the Heritage Highway Committee and ECLA representative for their work on this.

2012 ECLA Annual Meeting

The ECLA 2012 Annual Meeting will be held Friday, August 10th at 11:30 at Birchwood Farms Golf & Country Club, the Speaker is Howard Learner from the Environmental Law & Policy Center in Chicago, IL. He will be speaking on 'Restoring the Great Lakes: Next Steps following the November election.' Price is $15 a person.

What's in a View continued...

Clear cutting has been used in the past also. This produces three major draw backs. First, sloping sites are much more likely to erode from clear cutting. Second, the forest composition may significantly change. Forests growing in old clear cuts have a higher birch (Betula) and aspen (Populus) components, along with other pioneer species. These species may not be desirable for many sites, as they tend to grow quickly and have high mortality. Third, the re-growth is all relatively the same age meaning that most of the trees will obstruct the view at the same time, raising costs to manage the view. In some flat sites this may be an option if the fore mentioned does not create hazards. I am not saying that I prefer clear cutting to other forms of management, just that it may fit certain criteria for a specific site. The facts need to be scrutinized carefully before a clearing operation is undertaken.

The best views, I believe, are the one that use the forest as an accent as opposed to an obstruction. The simplest form would be selective limb removal to provide small windows through the foliage to see the distant views. This adds depth to a view while still maintaining a forest. This has relatively little impact on the erosion in the site, and if limb removal is limited to less than 30% of the trees foliage it has little impact on tree health. The one concern is that the limbs being removed are less than 33% of the diameter of the trunk where they are being removed from. Limbs greater than 33% of trunk diameter create wounds that are very difficult for the tree to seal off from decay. So, if many large limbs need to be removed to provide a view, it is safer to remove the entire tree.

The next evolution to limb removal is selective whole tree removal. Ten to twenty percent is the normally accepted mortality rate in a forest. If removal of whole trees is limited to this then it should not have an adverse effect on erosion. Additionally, it is unlikely that the species components will change much as long as this 10-20% window is observed. As trees become obstructions to the view they are removed in a management cycle. Small numbers are managed in a cycle leading to many small projects over time. This results in many different ages of tree, so there is less chance of losing the view in one season. The cost to manage is based on whole tree removal instead of topping, resulting in less cost over

Beach walkers needed:

We need help to monitor bird die-off on Lake Michigan's shores this fall. Volunteers are asked to walk a section of beach once a week for about 6 weeks around October. If you are interested, please attend an informational meeting at 4pm, Wednesday, September 19 at the Birchwood Country Club (upper level–library).

Register via email to Kevin or Dan at the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council (kevin@watershedcouncil.org or dan@watershedcouncil.org) to ensure you are kept aware of any meeting changes. See you on the beach!

Property Tax 101.1

An excellent article in the Summer 2011 ECLA Newsletter by Board Member Franz Neubrecht described the basics of how our property tax bills are computed. This brief article updates "Property Tax 101" for our summer and winter 2012 tax bills, the former due to be mailed soon.

Review of "The Two Main components that Effect your Property Tax"

A. The taxable value (TV) computed each February is the lower of the State Equalized Value (SEV) (50% of the true cash value on the preceding Tax Day, December 31) or the Capped Value as determined by the State of Michigan. For 2012 the taxable value is the lesser of:

   1. The 2011 TV increased by 2.7%, or
   2. The 2012 SEV.

For some ECLA property owners, the SEV may have decreased to the point that the 2012 TV has actually decreased compared with the 2011 TV. This resets the TV for future TV maximum increases. Enjoy it while it lasts.

B. The millage rate is the total of all the various millage rates passed or set by the voters or the taxing authority. For Emmet County homestead and non-homestead owners the 2012 millage rates for the summer and winter taxes will remain the same or very slightly higher (less than 0.6%) compared with the 2011 millage rates.

C. The tax bill then is the product of the TV and the millage rate appropriate for the summer or winter tax bill, often plus a 1% administration fee.

D. If you do not agree with the annual SEV or TV as announced in the Assessment Change Notice received about 1 March each winter and you wish to appeal, you MUST appeal to the early March Board of Review of that year. If you do and are not satisfied with the decision of the Board of Review, you may appeal further to the Michigan Tax Tribunal in Lansing by 30 June of that same year.

This is my best understanding of the facts regarding the 2012 summer and winter tax bills based on my research. Do not rely on this as The Gospel. If you have questions or have found an error(s) in my article, feel free to contact me, Rob Deane, @ 616 456-8463.

the long term and similar cost as clear cutting but without many of the ecological consequences. Over time specific individual trees can be selected for species or character to grow through the view plane to replace canopy trees as they eventually die. This will ensure a strong ecosystem.

Limb removal and whole tree removal can be combined to produce a greater view area than if one of the two processes is used. The effect on tree health will be similar to limb removal and erosion will be similar to whole tree removal, but the two are not likely to compound each other. There may be, however, more light that reaches the forest floor resulting in increased growth of the understory. This result will be significantly less than from clearing though.

Finally, the question to answer is what to do with the debris generated from any of the processes. Many times tops and downed trees are left whole where they fall. This may reduce erosion but it is unsightly and may even stifle future plant growth. Research has shown that cutting the limbs to approximately three foot lengths allows them to be small enough to allow new growth and to decay, along with being large enough that rain water will not carry them down slope. Trunks may be felled across the hill and laid to rest against stumps to provide a terrace effect, again reducing erosion.

Concern has arisen over the brush creating possible fire hazard. Our forests around the lakes are generally fairly fire resistant naturally, but this has led to hauling the brush up the slope and chipping it. The chips, if applied back to the hillside can provide nutrients to promote tree health, but they are easily moved by water from rain flowing downhill. To prevent this, the brush may b simply cut to lengths of approximately three feet long. This increases the amount of ground contact and accelerating decomposition. The decomposing brush is more fire and erosion resistant while providing the nutrient return that chip would also provide.

The message to take away from all of this is that all sites are different and that the goals of the project need to be clearly defined before work begins. Professional arborists should be able to assist with outlining which process is right for your site and tailor that to your needs. It is important to make small step in the beginning to determine how the ecosystem will respond.

Wind Turbine Overview

History

Windmills were used in Persia as early as 200 B.C. Wind power devices appeared in Europe during the Middle Ages. By the 14th century, the Dutch used windmills to drain areas of the Rhine delta. In July 1887, the first electricity generating wind turbine was a battery charging machine installed by Scottish academic James Blyth to light his home in Marykirk, Scotland. During this same period of time, American inventor, Charles F. Brush, built the first automatically operated wind turbine for electricity production in Cleveland, Ohio.

By 1900, there were 2,500 windmills for mechanical loads such as pumps and mills, producing an estimated peak power of about 30 mega watts (MW). During the period of World War I, American manufacturers were producing 100,000 farm windmills each year, mostly for pumping water. One of the first modern horizontal-axis wind generators was functional in Yalta, USSR in 1931. The 98 foot tower generated 100 kilowatts.

Modern Wind Turbines

Wind farm turbines, used commercially for the production of electric power, are usually three-bladed and are directed to the wind by computer-controlled motors. The light grey colored turbine blades blend in with the clouds and range in length from 66 to 130 feet or more. Some models use a direct drive; however more energy is generated by the variable speed turbines. Damage by high winds is ameliorated by the use of brakes and blade feathering capabilities.

Vertical Axis Design

Vertical-axis wind turbines (VAWTs) have the main rotor shaft arranged vertically instead of horizontally. The main advantage is that the turbine does not need to be pointed into the wind to be effective. The main disadvantages include the low rotational speed, higher torque requiring a costlier drive train, lower power output, and 360 degree rotation producing pulsating torque on the blades.

Small Wind Turbines

Small wind turbines provide lower energy output than the commercial wind turbine, These turbines may generate from 50 watts to 100 watts for boats, caravans, off-grid residences, telecom towers, offshore platforms, schools and clinics, small refrigeration units, and areas where there is no electric grid. The units are pointed into the wind via a vane, and they have geared power trains with lifetime bearings. Blade configuration may display either a two or three blade design.

Home Wind Turbines

Wind turbines can be used to replace a portion of home energy, reduce one's carbon footprint, and possibly produce electricity independent of the power grid. Everyone could pursue this path, but whether it is cost effective depends on where you live. For example, wind turbines are not recommended for heavily populated areas because urban development tends to break up wind patterns and flows creating uneven wind flow rates.

Elevated home wind turbines will come with a tower that is between 60-160 feet tall. According to an article in the Grand Rapids Press, a residential wind turbine in rural Michigan can produce between 300 and 500 kilowatt hours every month. It is unlikely that this is enough power to take over a home power consumption completely. To be off of the grid, a home might require several wind turbines and a battery backup system to store energy.

Installation of home wind turbines may range from $500 to $22,000 depending on the location and options included. Total cost of a larger wind turbine for home use could run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. A home wind turbine allows the owner to sell electricity back to an energy coop, or purchase it from them when winds are at a low level. There are state and federal tax breaks available that are associated with the U.S. Department of Energy "20% Wind Energy by 2030 Report".

Some businesses in Michigan have run into local zoning restrictions for wind turbine electricity generators. The State of Michigan has set the ambient noise level for wind turbines at a level of 55 decibels. Other restrictions may include where the wind turbine is located on the site in relation to an adjacent lot line, and whether the local residents oppose the project.

One obstacle to the further use of wind power centers on America's obsolete and congested power grid capacity. The U.S. Department of Energy has identified transmission limitations as the largest obstacle to realizing the economic, environmental, and energy security benefits of obtaining 20% of our electricity from wind power. Currently, around 270,000 megawatts of proposed wind projects, more than enough to meet 20% of our electricity needs, are waiting in line to connect to the grid because there is not enough transmission capacity to carry the electricity they would produce.

Local Use

In the United States, residential wind turbines with outputs of 2-10 kilowatts, cost between $12,000 and $55,000 installed ($6 per watt), although there are incentives and rebates available in 19 states that can reduce the purchase cost for local use by up to 50 percent, ($3 per watt). The U.S. manufacturer "Southwest WindPower," estimates that the cost payback is from 5-10 years.

Recently, an 11 kilowatt point-of-use wind turbine was installed in northern Emmet County. The 120-foot-Bliss Gardens turbine is located just south of Cross Village on Hill Road. The Bliss Gardens community kitchen has been using about 12 kilowatts of energy a year. The new turbine will allow for 22-25 kilowatt hours of energy. It is estimated that more than seventy-five percent of the energy produced will go into the grid to provide clean energy for the local community.

A Proposed New District Area Library in Harbor Springs

The Friends of the Harbor Springs Area District Library (HSADL) group are proposing a new library to be constructed in Harbor Springs. Several sites have been suggested including possible building sites located off East Lake Street near Hoover Field and the use of the former Shay Reservoir site off Judd, Main and Bay Streets. No Decision has been made at this date regarding a building site for the proposed new library.

Future site and building decisions will depend on fundraising. Once the site is agreed upon, the Harbor Springs Area District Library board must present a millage request to district voters no later than November 2012. The proposed millage and operating tax will be voted upon by the residents of the city of Harbor Springs, West Traverse, Little Traverse, Pleasantview, Readmond, and Cross Village Townships. At the proposed rate of 0.3 mills, a $100,000 taxable value parcel would pay $30/year. For the library millage, the tax rate will be the same for homestead and non-homestead properties. According to the Emmet County treasurer's office, the total number of homestead parcels in the library district is 3,567 and the total non-homestead parcels is 7,122. The total Capital Campaign goal is $3.6 million. This includes the proposed building cost of $2.1 million, and additional costs of $1.5 million for design, interior and exterior furnishings, and equipment. When this goal is achieved, the only additional cost to the taxpayers will be for operations. Operating costs are estimated at $300,000 per year. The library's board of trustees, who are appointed by each municipality in the library district, will decide what operating millage to request of voters and when to schedule the vote, sometime in 2012. It is estimated that the new proposed area district library will serve a population of 6,865 permanent and 12,000 part-time residents.

Library Funding in Emmet County

There are three public district area libraries in Emmet County, namely; Petoskey, Mackinaw City and Alanson. Petoskey city residents voted for a library millage. Bear Creek and Resort Township will vote in August to join the Petoskey Library with a levy of 0.4 mils. Any township could vote to do the same. Mackinaw City residents voted to pay a 0.3 mil library tax. Bliss Twp. officials pay 0.3 mils equivalent to Mackinaw City to be a branch of their library, which is not a millage. A public library does not need a millage to get public funds. Cross Village Township has decided to join the Mackinaw City Area District Library. Alanson does not have a library tax but their Board is considering asking voters for one. Currently, Alanson Area District Library is funded by penal fines (traffic violations, etc.) plus general funds and private donations. They have recently expanded building and services and hope for more operating funds.

MI law requires that all penal fines be distributed to a public library within the county. The Harbor Springs area has historically sent their penal fines to the Petoskey Library, but this year the Petoskey Library Board has decided that a municipality's penal fines will no longer be accepted in exchange for library cards. In the future, to be a member of the Petoskey District Library, municipalities must vote for a 0.4 millage. Then their residents will have free library cards. All others will pay $95 per card.

The Harbor Springs Library

The Harbor Springs Library is not an area district library. The Harbor Springs library is a privately funded public library. They do not receive public funding or tax dollars. The Private Library Board operates under the (501©3) IRS code. The library owns their building and receives rent from the 2 shops below it. Any other operating funds come from donations. Although the library is privately funded it is open to the public.

The Harbor Springs School District (7 municipalities) had to decide where to send penal fines this year. Six of them have decided to go with Alanson. Even though it is much smaller and less convenient than the Petoskey Library for most residents, it has offered a less expensive deal for library cards. Each municipality will pay $3 per capita (plus penal fines) for their residents to get library cards for the Alanson Area District Library.

Meanwhile, in Harbor Springs, Alex Osetek the current Library Director at the Harbor Springs Library has renovated and enhanced the library with many new and innovative ideas and services that are making a hit with the community. The new services include:

- book delivery to homebound residents.
- technology classes, art exhibits, audiobooks, printing services, meeting space.
- Spanish Conversation Groups.
- free Wifi.
- Thursday night movies.
- Mac and PC computer availability.
- a community Stitch group which is knitting socks and slippers for the Nehemiah House in Petoskey.
- A new website and newsletter.
- Spring Street Story time.
- Formation of a partnership with Between the Covers, a local book store, for discounted selected book purchases.
- a Celebrate Library Day in May.

Regardless of income or home resources, residents, students and visitors will use the free library to:

- find and apply for jobs.
- complete homework and research assignments.
- research colleges and training opportunities.
- file tax returns and online applications.
- E-mail.
- make travel arrangements.
- access computers after school and during summer recess.

Recent Breaking News

On Monday, June 20, 2012, the Harbor Springs City Council approved the service agreement with the Alanson District Library. Harbor Springs residents will still be able to use the Petoskey Library, however there will be a fee of $95.00 to become a cardholder.

Emmet County Lakeshore Association
Post Office Box 277
Harbor Springs MI 49740

In unity, there is strength

Board Members Contact Info:

Bob Bokram
E-mail: rhbokram@gmail.com
Telephone: 231.526.5274

Rob Deane
E-mail: f.r.deane@att.net
Telephone: 616.456.8463

Kimberly Dowd
E-mail: kdruns@gmail.com
Telephone: 231.242.0455

***Mandi Garber-Secretarial Services**
E-mail: northernsec@yahoo.com

Don Gschwind
E-mail: ldgschwind@yahoo.com
Telephone: 231.526.1158
Telephone: 248.540.1428

Fred Hoffmann
E-mail: dr-fred@live.com
Telephone: 231.526.6611

Lou Kasischke
E-mail: louk@gtlakes.com
Telephone: 231.242.0147

Franz Neubrecht
E-mail: fneubrecht@yahoo.com
Telephone: 231.526.5170

Catherine Reindel
E-mail: catherinereindel@sbcglobal.net
Telephone: 231.242.0458

George Reindel
E-mail: georgereindel@sbcglobal.net

Gary Rentrop
E-mail: grentrop@rentropmorrison.com
Telephone: 248.644.6970

Dick Selvala
E-mail: dickselvala@yahoo.com
Telephone: 231.526.5147

Dave Shear
E-mail: dave@elswest.com
Telephone: 734.665.5951 or
Mobile: 734.834.0809

Neighbor Helping Neighbor = High-Speed Internet Service?

Rumor has it that many more of us will soon have access to high-speed internet via broadband service.

Users of the service report that it is faster than the DSL that is available in our area. The service is also reported to be faster than satellite and unhindered by trees, heavy snow, or clouds.

The service, which is provided by Cherry Capital Connection ("CCC"), requires direct line-of-sight to a network transmitter° which until now has been unavailable to most of our area. The interesting thing about CCC's service is that, once one or two tower transmitters are in place, customers with the right property coordinates can "help" out-of-tower-sight-line neighbors achieve access by allowing a small "helper" box to be installed along with their normal receiver. According to Tim Maylone of CCC, installing a helper transmitter does not cause any decline in service (and may actually boost a homeowner's service).

Towers and transmitters are initiated at the property owner's request. Owners of ideal sites who choose to install a tower or transmitter reportedly receive a monthly service credit which slowly pays back the cost of their installment. The regulatory boundaries and volume minimums that dictate internet service availability through historical channels (such as with telephone providers) do not apply. If as your neighbor, I decide to build an unobtrusive tower on my property, I will benefit and so will you.

Recently-added towers have already brought service to many in Good Hart. CCC is working with local property owners to extend service along the shoreline. Given success with these sites, Mr. Maylone is optimistic that even those in "difficult" locations below the bluff or behind hills will soon have access. ECLA's board is meeting with representative from Cherry Capital Connections in July and will have an updated report on it Web site and Newletter.

To determine the status of your property's available coverage, contact Mr. Maylone at Cherry Capital Connection (231-590-5217).