



CRYSTAL LAKE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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On September 20, 2024, the CLWA sent the following questions to the two candidates for Benzie County Drain Commissioner, Mike Fiebig (R) and Ed Hoogterp (D). Hoogterp is the incumbent.

Hoogterp's response is **attached** below. Despite repeated attempts to contact Fiebig and the Benzie County Republican Party, we have not received any response from them. If we do receive a reply from Mr. Fiebig, we will post it.

Crystal Lake Watershed Association Board of Directors

- 1. What qualifications do you bring to this position?**
- 2. If you are elected, what would be your top 3 priorities for the next 4 years?**
- 3. What do you see as the biggest current challenge for the Benzie County Drain Commissioner?**
- 4. How does the Drain Commissioner contribute to the health and economy of Benzie County?**

"Protecting Crystal Lake Now for Generations to Come"

RESPONSES FROM ED HOOGERP

1. What qualifications do you bring to this position?

Ed is a Michigan journalist who covered state government and environmental issues for several newspapers and the MLive digital news operation before moving permanently to Benzonia Township in 2004. As an environmental consultant, he co-authored a Watershed Management Plan for Crystal Lake and the Betsie River, and is engaged now in updating a plan for the Platte River Watershed. He is past president of the Crystal Lake & Watershed Association, and chair of the Benzie County Parks and Recreation Commission. He is a graduate of Grand Valley State University. He has served as Benzie County Drain Commissioner since 2016.

2. If you are elected, what would be your top 3 priorities for the next 4 years?

Priority goals for 2025 and beyond, include:

Working with the Benzie Conservation District, township governments, and other public and private agencies to help protect the environment by developing a cooperative approach to zoning and land use processes throughout the county.

Completing needed repairs and updates to the publicly owned Crystal Lake Outlet Dam. The structure is nearing 50 years old and needs work to improve public safety, protect the environment and provide more effective lake-level control. This will require a cooperative effort among county government, lakefront property owners, and the townships bordering the lake.

Continuing progress to coordinate public awareness and enjoyment of Benzie County's outstanding land and water resources. This includes completion of the grant-funded Universal Access Park at the Crystal Lake Outlet; Internet mapping of park offerings in the county; and the completion of motorized and non-motorized trail systems.

3. What do you see as the biggest current challenge for the Benzie County Drain Commissioner?

Benzie County government faces long-term funding issues that have so far made it impossible to create positions for some vital functions such as planning, parks management, and economic development. Without those positions, we have sometimes missed opportunities to communicate and collaborate in ways that would benefit the entire community.

Much of this difficulty stems from state tax policies (Headlee Amendment, Proposal A, etc.), which have limited the growth of local tax revenues over the past 30-plus years. In August, Benzie County voters approved a proposition that may allow the Board of Commissioners and the voters to address this problem in the future.

Like all of Northern Michigan, we face challenges caused by climate change and an aging population. Climate change is already impacting our fruit-growing economy and causing more intense precipitation events that may require new policies to protect lakes, streams, and groundwater. This summer's low water levels in Crystal and other inland lakes reflect a trend toward seasonal extremes that are consistent with the scientific understanding of climate change. One obvious impact: the popular Benzonia Village ice-rink is unlikely to survive our warming winters, unless a way can be found to purchase and maintain a refrigeration system.

While Benzie has nearly unlimited outdoor warm-weather recreation opportunities, our population would benefit from more universally accessible facilities, and indoor sites that can be used throughout the year.

4. How does the Drain Commissioner contribute to the health and economy of Benzie County?

High quality lakes and streams are essential to both the quality of life and the economy of Benzie County.

The primary role of a county drain commissioner is to manage designated lake levels and surface water flows in order to minimize flood risk, protect private property and prevent pollution. By state law, the drain commissioner also serves as a member of the county Parks and Recreation Commission.

The drain commissioner is one of several officials or agencies responsible for maintaining high standards for surface water and ground water, along with the local health department and the state Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy.