



FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

Keeping Members Informed and Involved

President's Message

Greetings VELA Members,

You know the old saying "Time flies when you're having fun." Well, boy we sure must have had lots of fun this past summer! We had beautiful weather and made lots of summertime memories with family and friends.

This summer we saw many more kayakers and paddle boarders than before and lots, and lots, of children tubing. I love hearing the laughter and screams from the kids as they are towed around the lake and the fishing reports that I received from many said fishing was great! Perch, Pike and Walleye were plentiful.

Van Etten Lake has brought much joy to young and old. Many times, people will ask me where do you live and I say, Oscoda, and they reply, 'oh I vacationed there on Van Etten Lake as a kid!' From vacationing, to renting or owning a cottage so many lifelong memories have been and are being made today. In fact, at a recent VELA Board Meeting our Vice-President Charlie Bauer shared a touching story. Charlie has a friend who loves fishing. The man decided to buy a new Tri-Tune Pontoon boat. In less than a month later he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer!

The gentleman asked if he could come up and fish with Charlie and bring his wife, son and grandson who live in Atlanta Georgia. In the past, he and his wife had rented a cottage on Van Etten Lake, through Cole's Cottages. Well, the next morning Charlie took the crew out fishing and between 8:30 and 11:30 they only had two perch between the five of them! However, by 1:00 p.m. they had 50!



It was a beautiful sunny late September day. Charlie noticed the friend's wife was in the back of the boat fishing and watching everyone in the front catching all the fish. Her son said, mom come up here in front – it is where all the fish are being caught and Charlie heard her say, no . . . "I am just fine watching my son, grandson and husband catch fish . . . nothing is better than that!"

That evening they went back out and caught a few more beauties. A wonderful time was had by all. In 2 ½ days they took home 26 lbs. of perch fillets. His friend went home to begin his chemo treatments and at this writing just completed his 5th. Since then, Charlie sends his pictures of not only the fish he catches but the beautiful sunrises we see over Van Etten. His friend says he loves seeing the pictures and how much it brightens his day!

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President's Message (CONTINUED)

Fall is upon us! The gold and red leaves are appearing, and the crisp cool temperatures have arrived. This time of the year there is always so much to get accomplished before winter arrives, such as boat cleaning and winterizing, dock and lift removal, fall leaf cleanups and more. The sounds of power washers and chain saws are heard daily around here as many get their wood piles stocked for winter.

We truly are blessed with the splendor of all 4 seasons on the lake – yes even winter. We love sitting on our covered porch in the winter with a blanket and a mug of heated spiced cherry wine listening to the ice crack and an occasional coyote across the river.

VELA had a great year! We developed a new logo and website, including a free classified section for members to buy or sell lake related items, along with a business card directory of companies who service or sell to our members. Our membership is at 268 and this summer we had 5 new associate members join VELA – Tractor Bob's, Young's Lawn Care, SunnyBunns, Cole's Cottages and Shoreline Shower Door. To help build our membership the Board of Directors would like to ask all members to speak with your neighbors who are not members to join VELA. Direct them to go to the website for membership information – www.vanettenlake.com.



Also, we would like to begin a photo gallery page on our website of photo's obtained from our members. If you have an interesting photo of wildlife, fishing, boating or beauty, please forward a jpeg to velalakeassoc@gmail.com.

And lastly, but most importantly, our weed committee did a phenomenal job this year of working with our Lake Manager, Michael Smith, TIGRIS to make the appropriate adjustment to the scheduling of our treatments resulting in a beautiful lake this summer. Special thanks to our entire Weed Committee, Charlie Bauer, John Boettger, John Kraly, Ed Lanivich, Tim O'Harran, Joe Plunkey, Adam Romatz and Chairman, Dan Banks for their commitment to the health of our lake. Also, a special thank you to Adam Romatz for assuming the role of Water Quality Committee Chair this year and our Dam operator Greg Cole for the great job he did this year in managing our lake level!

Thank you all for your continued support of our great association. I look forward to seeing you all in the Spring. Enjoy your winter!

Kindest regards,
Diane Banks, VELA President





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VELA Picnic

Diane Banks, Picnic Chair

On Saturday, August 6th over 100 members of VELA gathered for our annual picnic at Ken Ratliff Park/Warrior Pavilion.

Everyone enjoyed a fabulous meal of barbecued pork, fried chicken and potato salad catered by the AuSable Inn. In addition, many members brought sides, such as, salads, baked beans, fruit salads, veggies, deviled eggs, etc. and many delicious desserts.

Following dinner, many in attendance took home gift certificates, donated by many of the local business, in and around Oscoda. Also, a raffle took place of baskets that were donated by the Association, individual board members and local businesses. Items such as a Barbecuing Basket, Coffee Basket, Beach Basket, Charcuterie Basket and many more. A fishing pole, donated by Wellman's Party and Bait was a raffle favorite along with a free pontoon shrink wrap donated by SunnyBunns Marine. The 'grand prize' was a golf outing package donated by Lakewood Shores Golf Resort! There was face painting and hair beading for the children and each child took home a gift.

"This is an excellent time for members to 'mix and mingle' with others from around the lake, stated Diane Banks, VELA President and Picnic Chair." A special thank you to all the donating companies/individuals (see list on right) for their generous donation and to all the members who attended!



A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO ALL THE DONATING COMPANIES/INDIVIDUALS!

AuSable Inn
Banks, Dan & Diane
Bogey's Indoor Golf Simulator – Tawas
Chee Peng Chinese Restaurant
Edelweiss Tavern
Erin Matthews Quilt Shop
Family Fare
From Huron Out Pub
Gilbert Drug Store
Greenbush Golf Course
Hart Tire
Heritage House Realty-Ann Richards
Kava Café Coffee Shop
Lake Theatre
Lakewood Shores Golf Resort
Mango's Mexican Restaurant – Tawas
Marvelous Mouse Travels – Jenn Boose
Mr. Jacks – Tawas
Napa Auto Parts
Nedo's Farm Market
Office Lounge & Grill
Parkside Dairy Queen
Red Fork
Rogers Family Foods
Route 23 Barbecue
Shastal, Steve & Helen
Shotmaker's Bar & Grill
Smoke Shop – Oscoda
SunnyBunns Marine
Tait's Bill of Fare
Target Real Estate Company
Tawas Bay Yarn Company
Van Etten Lake Association
Wagon Wheel Quilt Shop
Wellman's Party & Bait
Woods, Mike & Elsie





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NOW Happenings

Cathy Wusterbarth, NOW Co-Leader

Need Our Water (NOW) continues to work through the Restoration Advisory Board (RAB), with our legislators, the State of Michigan and the community in its priority to “Stop the Bleeding” of PFAS contamination from the former Wurtsmith AFB near Van Etten Lake. RAB meetings occur quarterly, and significant changes have been made to the staffing of the “site” on the part of the USAF. Previously, the site was managed by staff in the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Division of the Air Force Civil Engineering Center. It has now moved to the Environmental Restoration Division which describes its purpose as follows, “The Environmental Restoration Division provides environmental cleanup support across all installations. The division offers programming and execution expertise to transform Department of the Air Force environmental challenges into operational opportunities.”

In addition, we continue to advocate for solid, science-based remediation which captures the entire flow of contaminants off base property. You may have seen there are Interim Remedial Actions (the new filtration facility seen from F-41) in place to capture the groundwater flow, but we continue to be concerned about their effectiveness. We realize the cleanup of the base property will take decades, but they are legally responsible for stopping the flow off the property right now. Mark Henry continues to advise us with his expertise and observations which have proven to be invaluable for our entire community.

The east side of Van Etten Lake has been affected by the contamination also. We are reminded of this regularly by the “foam events” seen on the lake that accumulate on property on the east side of the lake.

Currently there is a “Data Gap Investigation” occurring which will include work to determine the extent of that contamination. The USAF has the legal responsibility to determine the “nature and extent of the contamination” which has yet to be defined.

The State of Michigan has released its new, 2025 Eat Safe Fish Guide. Unfortunately, the new guide includes new “Do Not Eat” health advisories for fish in Van Etten Lake. According to MDHHS that means, “No one should eat fish listed as Do Not Eat, regardless of age or health. When these fish were tested, MDHHS found very high levels of chemicals. Eating even one meal of these fish could possibly lead to health problems in the future, regardless of age or health.” These fish include Bluegill, Largemouth Bass/Green Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Pumpkinseed/Sunfish. Please share this information with your family and friends. NOW is attempting to elevate this concern with our State Legislators through the Great Lakes PFAS Action Network.

According to MDHHS, “Data collection for the Oscoda Area Exposure Assessment (OAEA) ended in December 2024. We estimate that all participants will have all results for the nearly 200 chemicals we are measuring by Winter 2026. After analyzing participants’ lab results and survey answers, reports will be created summarizing what we learned. These reports will be available to the public online. MDHHS’s OAEA project was an investigation of exposure to certain chemicals in the blood and urine of residents of the Oscoda area, including mercury, PCBs and PFAS.

If you have any questions about the project, please call 844-464-7327, between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you have questions about Need Our Water, please contact me at nowactiongroup@gmail.com or by phone at (810) 441-9855. You may also follow us on Facebook at “needourwaternow”.





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WEED COMMITTEE REPORT

The year started with a major change with Lake Pro (our lake manager) being purchased by Tigris. Tigris is a large aquatic services company with 20 locations in 15 states. This change will make a larger network of aquatic services available. Our managers did not change, Michael Smith and Cameron Smith, they did a fantastic job of meeting every survey and application date while contributing their vast knowledge to our program's success. They will continue as our managers for 2026.

Solitude Lake Management is our applicator company that did a great job of meeting our application dates. Their application equipment is state of the art not just in their precise metering capability but the ability to change from surface to underwater treatment. This allows treatment in windy poor weather where surface application could not be achieved and the treatment delayed. Delayed treatments result in more weed biomass that contribute to high phosphorous and resulting algae. Solitude will again be our applicator company in 2026 and already have the required EGLE (Michigan Department of Environment Great Lakes & Energy) permitting in place. Thank you, Solitude, for your great performance in 2025 and looking forward to 2026.

The timing of the treatments is critical to a positive outcome. Weeds are full of phosphorous and other nutrients that release those nutrients when decaying after being treated. You have all seen our lake turn into "pea soup" in late summer but not this year. The decaying weeds form a layer of muck on the bottom that encourage a type of algae called Chara that grows in that muck layer.

When the muck is disturbed by boat wake or other cause the nutrients are released, and algae blooms occur. Wakeboats operating in 'Wakeboat mode' have been documented to disturb the bottom 20 to 30 feet (depending on the boat) creating unnatural barren areas that do not support vegetation or fish. This may have occurred between Loud Island and Grass Island, a popular Wakeboat path, where entire weed beds have disappeared along with the fish.

WEED COMMITTEE

Dan Banks, Chairman

Committee Members:

Charlie Bauer, John Boettger
John Kraly, Ed Lanivich, Tim O'Harran,
Joe Plunkey, Adam Romatz

Seawalls and shorelines are eroded when this high energy unnatural wave hits the wall and releases its energy. You can see the effects of Wakeboat activity on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPPhdLGrWX0Y>.

The committee conducted a second year of testing the performance of muck reducing pellets. An average of 2.5 ft of muck was consumed by these beneficial microbes with three treatments of pellets. This heavy muck area is in the north bay that also did not experience total algae growth for the first time in my memory in decades. For more information on purchasing muck pellets visit the VELA website at www.vanettenlake.com

Committee member Adam Romatz performs the CLMP (Clear Lake Monitoring Program) testing for MSU. One of the tests is clarity and Adam reported the highest clarity ever, almost 10ft! This is just another benefit from proper treatments and their timing. Decaying weeds use oxygen during the decaying process. We also had an increase in the dissolved oxygen content of our water resulting in a higher-than-normal crop of minnows.

Just a reminder that our SAD (Special Assessment District) charges you for ONLY expenses incurred. There is NO account holding collected unspent funds.

You have the Weed Committees commitment to provide you the best lake quality for recreation and fishing that we can. Any questions can be referred to danbanks180@gmail.com.



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PRVEL UPDATE

Russell Williams, Lead Board Member

PRVEL normally meets on the second Thursday of January, April, July and October at 10 am at the Alcona Conservation District Office located at 320S. State St., Harrisville. All are welcome to attend; there are coffee and snacks for enjoyment.

Monitoring and tending work continue at the riparian buffer planting project along Barlow Rd. near Pine River Trail. If you are interested in helping out with this ongoing effort let us know.

We are currently brainstorming for a project at Ratliff Park and hope to start some activities soon. If you have any ideas or thoughts, you think could help, let us know. There are some invasive species growing at the park we could work on, and there might be some room for a short trail, and a demonstration pollinator riparian buffer garden.

Donations are always welcome; without your support we cannot sustain the group. For information please contact Russell Williams, Lead Board Member, at russell.williams@macd.org or try 989-335-8563 talk & text.

VELA and PRVEL Partnership

Reprinted with permission from PRVEL

Beginning In 1997, the Van Etten Lake Association (VELA) was encouraged by Richard Shoemaker of the then Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for VELA to create an organization to seek a grant to better understand the correlation between the quality of the water coming into Van Etten Lake from the Pine river, homeowner influences on that water, and the quality of the water as it leaves the lake (via the dam). An informal group of interested persons including Ken Ratliff, Larry Murphy, Jerry Ward and Pat Copland of VELA, Kelly Duke, USDA Natural Conservation Services, Gary Kellan, Oscoda Township and Ed Roddy, Alcona Township became founding members of the Pine River Van Etten Lake Watershed Coalition (PRVEL), which was officially formed in November, 1999 with the purpose of obtaining a grant. With the assistance of Ms Duke, an EPA 319 watershed Planning grant was applied for and approved in June, 2001 and Richard Myrick, USDA, Alcona Conservation District was hired as the Planning Project Manager later that month. The plan was completed in 2003. The main purpose of the watershed management plan was to provide for better monitoring of what was happening within the 187,000 acres making up the area feeding into the lake with the understanding that "what happens up the river directly affects the lake".

INTERESTING STATS

Watershed size – 187,000 miles
Watershed wetlands – 6,404 acres
Pine River miles – 372 miles
Lakes within the watershed - 10
VanEtten Lake surface area – 1,409 acres
Lake shoreline length – 10.7 miles
Lake mean depth – 14 ft.
Lake maximum depth – 30 ft.



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2025 Van Etten CMLP Lake Water Quality Report

Adam Romatz, Lead Lake Monitor

2025 was a great year on Lake Van Etten and I hope everyone was able to utilize our amazing lake and the nature surrounding. The 2025 water clarity showed improvement over 2024 with a slightly increased average but more importantly a more consistent clarity throughout the season. As I was taking my last ride on the lake during the bonus summer weekend of October 4th the water clarity continued with very small sections of algae present. We were able to stop off on grass island with our dog Quincy for one more dip in the lake where the water was very refreshing. With the final data sheets being emailed in and online data entry complete, I am eager to perform this task again in 2026. I do however see a need for some assistance in the event I am not available and would like to solicit for volunteers to the clarity program. The testing is very simple with just a Secchi disk and a clipboard and there is training materials available. Please take a moment to review the training and see if this is something that may interest you.

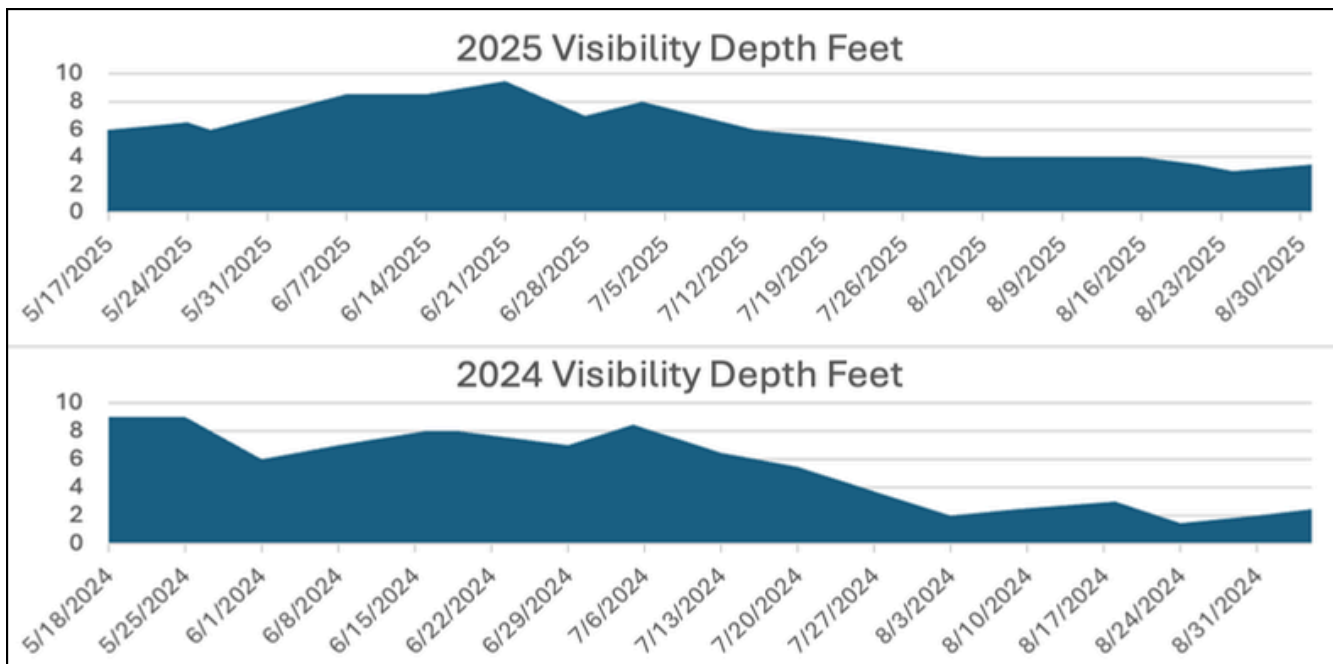
<https://www.micorps.net/lake-monitoring/lake-training/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpmUfyIH2Bs>

https://www.micorps.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-CLMP-Training_Secchi.pdf

SECCHI DISK CLARITY

Weekly clarity sampling started in mid-May and the average of the weekly sampling readings this year is 5.7ft, which compares to an average of 5.4 in 2024 and 6.2 ft over the past 10 years. Below are graphs to demonstrate the fluctuations of depth over time in the past two years with 2025 while starting lower was more consistent with improved clarity through August. After the final SECCHI disk sample during the week of Sept 14-20 the results will be uploaded into the MiCorps Data Exchange.



PHOSPHOROUS TESTING: The results of the phosphorus sampling for this year will be available later this fall.

CHLOROPHYLL A TESTING: The results of Chlorophyll sampling for this year will be available later this fall

PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR : We will be participating in the CLMP monitoring program again next year.

This is our 37th year of participation in the program, the results of all the sampling from year 1986 can be found at the www.micorps.net website under "Data Exchange-View Data."



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RAB Report

Mark Henry, WAFB Community RAB Co-Chair

Wurtsmith Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) meetings are generally on the second month of each quarter, on the third Wednesday of those months. The next RAB meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 19 November 2025 starting at 5:00 PM with a poster session beginning at 4:00 PM. The in-person option will be held at the Oscoda United Methodist Church. Live streaming will be available for virtual participation. Watch the Oscoda Press for the link to the live streaming option. On Tuesday, November 18, 2025, there will be an informal Technical Meeting that is open to the public and will likely be held at the Oscoda Holiday Inn.

Construction of an interim remedial action (IRA) for the Alert Aircraft Area (AAA) groundwater has been operational since January 2025 and is intended to reduce the amount of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) reaching Van Etten Lake for a portion of PFAS in that area of the base. The USAF's preferred project alternative is hydraulic control of the PFAS using pump and treat with granular activated carbon (GAC). The IRA includes a line of extraction wells that intercept part of the highest PFAS concentrations in groundwater from the AAA before they reach the lake. The extraction wells treat approximately 288,000 gallons per day which is discharged to septic system-like infiltration galleries. The treatment capacity of the pump and treat system will be 500 gallons per minute (gpm) with the room to be expanded to treat an additional 500 gpm treatment train should future expansion be required.

The AF is considering four additional IRA's for other parts of the former Air Force base that were suggested by their Critical Process Analysis team. Two of those were to be implemented in 2025, but now the Air Force has decided to delay these until 2026 - 2027. The other two IRA may be implemented in 2028 if funding is available. Part of the Three Pipes IRA is being conducted in the spring of 2026. Underground storm sewer joints that are allowing contaminated groundwater into the storm sewer system are being sealed which should prevent highly contaminated groundwater from directly discharging to the Three Pipes ditch at the sewer outfall. The majority of the Remedial Investigation work has been performed by the Air Force contractors, with the remainder of the work to be performed during the "data gap investigation" to be performed next year. The AF has established a Technical Working Group for discussing upcoming investigations, comprised of AF experts, EGLE, RAB experts, and the Oscoda Township engineer. We have had two productive meetings so far. Once the investigations have been completed, the Air Force will be selecting additional remedial actions during the Feasibility Study portion of the cleanup process. Public input will be solicited as part of the Feasibility Study process for each of the remedies that will be implemented.

2025-2026 Board Members

President -- Diane Banks
velabpres@gmail.com

Vice President -- Charles Bauer
chabauer@gmail.com

Treasurer -- Tim O'Harran
tpoharran@gmail.com

Secretary -- Helen Shastal
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At-Large Board Members

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John Kraly
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Ed Lanivich
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Janet Swenson
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Mike Woods
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2026 CALENDAR

June 6, 2026

VELA General Meeting

July 11, 2026

VELA Annual Meeting

August 1, 2026

VELA Picnic

September 5, 2026

VELA General Meeting

Property Checks Available

Iosco County Sheriff's Department provides free security checks to homeowners who will be away from their homes for a period of time. They will periodically check the exterior of the premises. This service is offered to deter potential burglars and provides additional security while your home is unoccupied.

Please download and return completed form (PDF) to:

Iosco County Sheriff's Department
Sheriff Scott Frank
428 W. Lake Street, Tawas
(989) 362-6164