

The Freshwater Connection



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Gibboney Lake - An Important Local Wetland
in March 2020
By Chuck Miller, CAFC President

In March before life in North America changed forever I led a group from the Sault Naturalists on a snowshoe of Gibboney Lake on March 7, 2020. This is what we found.



We explored the marshland associated with Gibboney Lake. The lake is a significant wetland in Johnson Township. This wetland is located 6 km northeast of Desbarats on the Old Mill Road. The weather was cooperative with just below freezing temperatures, fresh snow two days previous, light south wind and a mix of sun and cloud.



This trip was to look for signs of winter life in the marsh. The group was not in a hurry and had only 2 - 3 km to explore. We were generally looking for tracks and winter homes - but were happily surprised when two otters and bald eagles made an appearance.



Beaver House



Muskrat Push Up





We started our explorations at Old Mill Road where a section of Crown land joins the road to the lake. There had been a report of a Great Gray Owl along the access from Highway #17 but we did not see it. The outflow of Gibboney Lake is Stobie Creek - the water is open here and wild turkeys come to drink and the otters to slide over the snow. There was lots of evidence of otter activity along Stobie Creek and more as we moved toward the lake.



The outflow of the lake had a beaver dam and we soon came to the beaver house. Chickadees and ravens were present along the way.



While circumnavigating the first bay of the lake we came to rose hips, and in the alder, a nest made by an Eastern Kingbird about ½ meter above the snow level.



Swamp Rose



Nest of Eastern Kingbird



A Red Fox had left tracks in the snow where drifting snow had hardened the snow surface.



Red Fox Tracks

Tamarack trees lined the shore and we ventured over and dug a snow pit to search for plants including bog rosemary, cranberry, and swamp laurel. This all indicated that the fringe of the lake was a fen, a wetland with less nutrients than a marsh but with some ground water flow. Marshes have more water flow and higher nutrients and support plants such as cattails.



Swamp Laurel

In the fen we took advantage of protection from the south breeze offered by the tamarack and black spruce trees to have lunch.



Snowshoe Hare and wing impressions also marked the snow. While having lunch two otters took the opportunity to come out onto the ice – where open water existed between the large and small bay of the lake. Everyone had a good look as the otters returned as we circumnavigated the lake. A mature bald eagle flew over and later an

immature bald eagle. Looking off to the north – first one and then two bald eagles were seen perched in a dead tree along the ridge.



Bald Eagle

We carried on to the east where a cattail marsh indicated the inflow of Black Creek.



We stopped to look at cattails. The group then skirted the creek inflow arriving at some possible coyote tracks - judging by the stride length they seemed too long to be a fox.



Coyote Tracks



We checked out a patch of phragmites that was of the invasive type being careful not to inadvertently spread any seeds.



Common Reed (Invasive Phragmites)



Heading back west we passed an abandoned duck hunting blind – following the narrows between the two bays where we had seen the otters on the ice. We followed Stobie Creek and arrived back at our cars on Old Mill Road.



My Riparian Alteration, a cautionary tale By Bob Kellum

My Riparian Alteration, a cautionary tale.

When staying at our Algoma camp, a favorite family pastime is to take contemplative boat rides along the lake's long and variable shoreline. Much of the near shore is not conducive to development and retains the natural water-wending ways that negotiate around obstacles and filter runoff. The far shore, with easier access and sheltered bays, features numerous camps that showcase a variety of eras, aspirations and budgets. On these boat rides I admire the interplay of nature's vying elements while assessing the riparian alternations made by fellow lake dwellers in their quest for enhanced habitation and recreation.



I also indulge a smug, almost-harsh, bias about how riparian zones should be respected and their alteration kept to a minimum. Yes, our camp enjoys the usual lakeshore amenities, but ours are rustic, minimalist and unobtrusive. So we are good lake stewards. We have done our due diligence. We are immunized against such criticism. Or so I thought.

Three summers ago I became inaugural president of our newly formed private road committee and I immediately arranged to have the road ditched, and while I was at it, our steeply descending drive also. The ditching would address road erosion caused by annual spring melts and periodic heavy rains. Subject to refinement, the ditching has successfully stabilized the road and curtailed erosion.

Now the runoff above our driveway is effectively intercepted by a ditch which directs a large volume of water down its steep channel, causing the ditch itself to erode and create a delta of transported soil at its base. Below that delta, the sometimes-brown water fans out across a short slope that can absorb or filter only light rains. Beyond this, heavier water loads drain either as a sheet across compacted gravel or to a small culvert, before entering a seasonal wetland that acts as a natural retention pond.



Serendipitously, a tall dead tree fell along a crest where the wetland breaks toward the lake, effectively creating a damn capable of holding back considerable overflow along its length. This wetland, with its log damn, is the last opportunity for water to be absorbed or clarified before it descends the last 75 feet to the lake. I have seen water breach the dam and reach the lake on two

occasions, only once carrying enough silt to create a visible plume, once too many. Without understanding the repercussions, I had created a drainage short-cut to the lake.

Seemingly inconsequential alternations to natural riparian zones can be multiplied by hundreds of similar “improvements” around the lake and then compounded by the increased frequency of extreme weather events. We all recognize the troubling signs that the lake is changing. But have we compromised lake integrity or are we simply averse to its inevitable change? Indulging in uncertainty, we easily kick this can down the road.

Considering my membership on the board of the Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition and my holier-than-thought self image, my conscience requires me to openly admit culpability and accept the humility it suggests. Rest assured I will continue to monitor the problem I created and mitigate the ongoing erosion. I will also think twice before again trying to exert my will over water’s ever-winding descent across a fragile landscape. - Bob Kellum

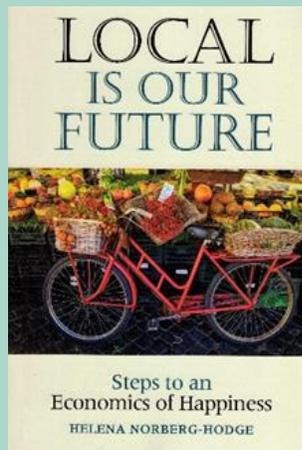
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Book Review

Local is our Future – Steps to an Economics of Happiness – by Helena Norberg Hodge



Publisher's description -"Globalization has no future. Political stability is a thing of the past; climate chaos is intensifying; anxiety disorders are of epidemic proportions; extremism and fundamentalism are becoming the norm. And yet we cling to the wreckage. Politicians of every hue continue to be in thrall to the global market. To challenge 'free trade,' which is the very essence of globalization, is all but unthinkable. But challenge it we must. And replace it. The future will be local. And the good news is that it is already happening. Under the radar of the mainstream media, a worldwide localization movement is emerging. On every continent, people are coming together to claw back control over their own economies, and in doing so are rebuilding connections to one another, while repairing fractured communities and damaged environments."