



2020 HIGH WATER INFORMATION FACT SHEET

High Water Information for Otsego County Residents

This document is meant to answer questions and provide resources to Otsego County residents affected by flooding and high water issues. Listed below are various questions and answers, miscellaneous resources, and contact information for different agencies who deal with concerns related to flooding and high water. The document was created in collaboration with several relevant agencies to pool information into one easy-to-navigate source.

Who do I call for concerns related to flooding issues?

Which agencies handle what?

Are permits needed for projects in inland lakes and streams?

What resources are available to gather more information?

Is assistance provided for flood alleviation projects?



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Thank you to the agencies involved in the creation of this document:

- Health Department of Northwest Michigan*
- Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)*
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR)*
- Otsego County Board of Commissioners and Administration
- Otsego County Road Commission*
- Otsego County Soil Erosion and Conservation District*
- Otsego County Land Use Services*
- Otsego County Housing
- Otsego County Emergency Management
- Otsego County Fire Department
- Township Government*
- Wade Trim Associates, Inc.

*Agencies who deal with permitting and other high water related issues.

Section 1: Flood Alleviation Projects

1. Are there resources available to help me plan a flood alleviation project?

- a. The Michigan Department of Environment Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) has resources to provide technical assistance on projects, including information on water levels and trends, compliance with state environmental laws, shoreline protection techniques, and best management practices. [Here](#) is a link to EGLE's high water webpage.
- b. Funding assistance and direct project management for individual projects is typically not provided by state or local agencies. Assistance may be available to low-income households for some projects through the [Otsego County Housing and Veterans Affairs Office](#).

2. Do I need a permit for work relating to a flood alleviation project?

- a. Permits are required for many activities associated with wetlands, inland lakes, and streams, including:
 - i. Fill, dredge, draining, or water level control activities affecting inland lakes, streams, and regulated wetlands.
 - ii. Projects affecting shorelines, dams, and floodplains.
 - iii. Emergency permitting may be available when a project is deemed necessary to protect property or the public health, safety or welfare.

3. What agencies are responsible for permitting work related to high water and flood alleviation?

- a. Depending on the nature of the work, permits may be needed from the following agencies (click on each to be redirected to their website):
 - i. [Michigan Department of Environment Great Lakes and Energy](#)
 - ii. [Health Department of Northwest Michigan](#)
 - iii. [The Otsego County Road Commission](#)
 - iv. [The Otsego County Conservation District](#)
 - v. [Otsego County Land Use Services](#)

Please see the [contact information section](#) at the end of this document for contacts at each agency.

Section 2: Environmental Concerns

1. Who do I call with concerns related to well and septic systems affected by flooding?

- a. [The Health Department of Northwest Michigan](#) handles permitting and concerns related to well and septic systems.

2. What if I don't know where my septic system or well is located?

- a. Homeowners can contact the [Health Department](#) for a record search to see if any septic and/or well permits are available on file for reference.

3. I am concerned of possible water contamination. What do I do?

- a. [Health Department](#) offices have test kits available for many types of water sampling, including bacteriological and surface water sampling. The Health Department recommends that homeowners affected by flooding increase the frequency of bacteriological sampling to ensure their water supply remains safe to drink and swimming areas remain safe.
- b. The [Michigan Department of EGLE](#) also provides various water quality testing. For spill reporting and environmental emergencies, the State [EGLE Pollution Emergency Alerting System \(PEAS\)](#) Hotline should be contacted at 800-292-4706. The PEAS hotline is staffed to take calls 24/7.

4. My neighbor is discharging water onto my property and it is causing damage. Who do I call?

- a. Surface water discharge disputes between landowners are a civil matter and are not currently enforced by any state or local agency. Property owners concerned about damage should contact an attorney.

5. I am concerned with general junk, debris, and inoperable machinery and/or vehicles in the water. What are my options?

- a. The Otsego County Zoning Ordinance has regulations in place prohibiting the keeping of garbage, junk, and inoperable machinery and vehicles on properties. [Otsego County Planning and Zoning](#) can be contacted to file a complaint against a specific property.

Section 3: Inland Lake Access and Restriction Enforcement

1. My road is flooded or is close to being flooded. Who do I call?

- a. The [Otsego County Road Commission](#) can be contacted with concerns related to County Road access and/or road drainage issues. For a private road, road / culvert maintenance is the responsibility of the landowner(s).

2. Who do I contact with concerns regarding the status of a public boat launch?

- a. [The Michigan Department of Natural Resources](#) operates and maintains most inland lake public access sites. Residents should contact the DNR with questions and concerns relating to specific boat launch access sites (see [contact information](#) below).

3. Who is responsible for enforcing boating regulations such as wake restrictions?

- a. The [Michigan DNR](#) and the [Otsego County Sheriff's Department](#) enforce boating regulations such as wake restrictions. Complaints can be filed by contacting either agency.

Section 4: Miscellaneous

1. What is causing the high water in Otsego County?

- a. There are several factors that are contributing to high water levels. These include: above-average rainfall totals, large snow melt-water volume, slower soil infiltration rates, and record-high Great Lakes water levels. EGLE has more background information available online [here](#).

While certain regulatory building requirements are in place to help prevent homes from being affected by high water (such as not allowing construction within 50' of the water), it is important to recognize that inland lake water levels are not static. Though we are currently experiencing unprecedented high water levels, it wasn't long ago our area was suffering from widespread low water levels. Lake level cyclicity must be taken into account by lakefront homeowners when constructing any new buildings on their property.

Section 5: Local Government's Role

1. What can local municipalities (Townships, Cities, Villages) do?

- a. Local municipalities can declare an official State of Emergency if conditions warrant. Depending on the nature of the situation, Federal disaster assistance may become available.
- b. Certain lake specific ordinances and regulations, such as wake and speed restrictions, can be enacted by local municipalities. See [Appendix A](#) below for more information.

2. What can County Government do?

- a. In addition to permitting and access management as discussed in other sections of this document, County Government can also aid in disaster and State of Emergency declarations.

3. Can Otsego County perform lake level reduction projects or install lake level control structures?

- a. Otsego County does not have dedicated funds to perform large scale lake level control projects. Expenses for individual projects are the responsibility of individual homeowners. Such projects require proper regulatory approval and permitting. If a large group of residents wish to perform a major project at their own expense, the County and/or Township may be able to aid in the development of certain funding mechanisms, such as the establishment of a Special Assessment Tax District.

Large scale lake level control projects such as pumping are likely to only have a temporary affect due to the nature of area groundwater levels. Several communities and lake associations in Michigan have attempted lake level reduction projects that have been only temporarily successful at a great cost to homeowners. Examples of many such failed projects is available in a recent MLIVE news article [here](#).

4. Is flood insurance through FEMA available in Otsego County?

- a. Flood insurance through FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is not available in Otsego County. Currently, Otsego County is not identified by FEMA as being a flood prone community due our County's general geographic and geologic characteristics.

Section 6: Resources from other Agencies

Click on the links below to be redirected to each webpage / document.

1. Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)

- [High Water Webpage](#)
- [Permitting Fact Sheet](#)
- [Water Level Fact Sheet](#)
- [Joint Permit Application](#)
- [Joint Permit Application Webinar](#)
- [Permit and Complaint Submittal](#)

2. Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)

- [High Water Information Webpage](#)
- [Boating Access Site Information Page](#)
- [Conservation Officer Contact Information](#)

3. Health Department of Northwest Michigan

- [Permitting Webpage](#)
- [High Water Fact Sheet](#)

4. Otsego County

- Otsego County Road Commission
 - i. [Permitting Webpage](#)
- Otsego County Soil Erosion and Conservation District
 - i. [Permitting Webpage](#)
 - ii. [Shore-land Regulations](#)
- Otsego County Building Department
 - i. [Permitting Webpage](#)
- Otsego County Planning and Zoning
 - i. [Otsego County Zoning Ordinance](#)
 - ii. [Permitting Webpage](#)

Section 7: Contact Information

Agency	Name	Email	Phone #	Responsibility
Michigan Department of EGLE	Brian Marshall	marshallb6@michigan.gov	(989) 370-0462	Permits for work in inland lakes and streams, water quality testing
Michigan Department of EGLE	PEAS Hotline	N/A	(800) 292-4706	24/7 spill reporting and environmental emergency calls
Michigan Department of EGLE	EGLE Information Assistance Center	N/A	(800) 662-9278	Non-emergency line for info on EGLE programs, regulations, reporting requirements
Health Dept. of Northwest Michigan	Chuck Edwards	c.edwards@nwhealth.org	(989) 732-1794	Well and septic permitting and maintenance, water quality testing
Otsego Co. Soil Erosion	Patricia Osburn	posburn@otsegocountymi.gov	(989) 732-4021	Shore-land permits for work within 50' of the water's edge
Otsego Co. Planning and Zoning	Chris Churches	cchurches@otsegocountymi.gov	(989) 731-7400	Permits for work greater than 50' from the water's edge, zoning enforcement
Otsego Co. Building Department	James Mouch	jmouch@otsegocountymi.gov	(989) 731-7400	Building, mechanical, electrical, and demolition permitting
Otsego County Veterans Affairs and Housing	Marlene Hopp	mhopp@otsegocountymi.gov	(989) 731-7570	Assistance to low-income families for flood related housing repairs
Otsego Co. Road Commission	Jason Melancon	melanconj@ocrc-mi.org	(989) 732-5202	County road and culvert drainage concerns, driveway permitting
Michigan DNR Parks and Recreation	Kelly Kinser	kinserk@michigan.gov	(989) 732-3541	State maintained boating access sites
Michigan DNR Conservation Officer	Lt. James Gorno	gornoj1@michigan.gov	(989) 732-3541	Boating law enforcement

Agency	Name	Email	Phone #	Responsibility
Otsego Co. Sheriff's Department	U/S Matt Muladore	usheriff69@otsegocountymi.gov	(989) 732-3555	Boating law enforcement
Otsego Co. EMS / Homeland Security	Jon Deming	jon@ocems.com	(989) 732-9085	Emergency vehicle access concerns
Otsego Co. Fire Department	Dave Duffield	duffieldd@frontier.com	(989) 350-9680	Emergency vehicle access concerns
Bagley Township	Suprv. Michelle Noiro	N/A	(989) 732-5924	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Chester Township	Suprv. Bonny Miller	N/A	(989) 732-5886	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Charlton Township	Suprv. Matt Nowak	N/A	(989) 731-1920	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Corwith Township	Suprv. Vernon Kassuba	N/A	(989) 983-3993	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Dover Township	Suprv. Thomas Murphy	N/A	(989) 732-1223	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Elmira Township	Suprv. Diane Franckowiak	N/A	(989) 732-2920	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Hayes Township	Suprv. Mary Sanders	msanders@freeway.net	(989) 732-4206	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Otsego Lake Township	Suprv. Thomas Wagar	N/A	(989) 732-6929	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns
Livingston Township	Suprv. Norm Brecheisen	N/A	(989) 732-7688	Lake specific ordinances, area specific concerns

Agency	Name	Email	Phone #	Responsibility
State Representative	Triston Cole	TristonCole@house.mi.gov	(517) 373-0829	State level concerns, legislative issues
Senator	Jim Stamas	SenJStamas@senate.michigan.gov	(855) 347-8036	State level concerns, legislative issues

APPENDIX A: HOW ARE LAKE SPECIFIC REGULATIONS AND ORDINANCES ENACTED?

A portion of the Michigan Marine Safety Act (MCL 324.80109 et seq.) contains a procedure for enacting temporary or permanent “special watercraft rules” (wake restrictions, speed limits, etc.). Pursuant to that statute, a group of riparian property owners or the local government can request that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) consider a special watercraft rule for a particular inland lake or a portion of the lake. The DNR then holds a public hearing regarding the special watercraft rule request. If the DNR decides not to impose such a rule or regulation, the matter ends. If the DNR approves the special watercraft rule, it cannot be effective until and unless the local municipality also enacts the special watercraft rule without any changes. Once a special watercraft rule is adopted for an inland lake, it has the force of law. Any qualified police officer can issue tickets or citations for the violation of a special watercraft rule.

More information on enacting special watercraft rules is available in an informational guide produced by The Michigan Riparian Magazine [here](#).

Please [contact your Township Official](#) to start the process of enacting special watercraft rules on a specific inland lake.