

# Texas Township residents seek answers and action to end flooding

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TEXAS TOWNSHIP, MI -- A feeling of crisis in Texas Township is growing as residents wonder whether a solution to reduce flooding around inland lakes will bring problems to the doorstep of their downstream neighbors.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality is considering a permit requested by Texas Township to pump water from Crooked Lake and Eagle Lake to Bass Lake and surrounding wetlands. Floodwaters encroaching on more than 100 properties have caused some to abandon their homes while residents worry the situation will worsen during the spring snowmelt.



Texas Township seeks DEQ permit to pump flooded lakes

Water would need to be pumped from Eagle Lake into Crooked Lake at a rate of 1,500 gallons per minute. Pumps will remove water from Crooked Lake to wetlands adjacent to Bass Lake at a rate of 3,000 gpm.

Eagle Lake would need to be pumped for about 6 months to return to normal levels and Crooked Lake would need to pump about 8 months.

To approve the permit, the DEQ must find pumping the lakes will not adversely affect the public trust or riparian rights and take public comments from property owners. During a Monday, Feb. 11 public hearing, Thomas Schripsema said he's not too proud to beg his downstream neighbors to support the permit.

"The water is rising," Schripsema said. "In the coming weeks, I look to possibly displace my family of five. Our life savings are at risk through no fault of our own. Please allow our home to be saved. Please give us our lives back."



## Residents battle rising lake levels, flooded yards

The problems began last October with heavy rains, but were made worse in February with snow melt and thawing ice.

DEQ Environmental Quality Analyst Derek Haroldson said the issue is the "top priority" for the Kalamazoo office. DEQ will [accept additional written comments](#) until Feb. 21 and make a decision by May 6.

Several homeowners who live near Bass Lake asked the DEQ to deny the permit based on adverse impacts they could face if floodwaters are pushed northeast. Representatives of lake associations for Crooked Lake and Eagle Lake said those concerns are overblown.

Kalamazoo County Deputy Drain Commissioner Jeffrey VanBelle said there will be no adverse downstream impact. A permanent solution is likely years away, he said, but something needs to be done now to relieve residents of a significant threat to their property.

"The level of stress and intensity has dramatically increased form the last few months," VanBelle said. "Even if the crisis is averted, we still need to work on this permanent solution. I am totally convinced we will be back in this one day."

Mary Ewalt said residents will suffer if the permit is denied, but she and others could suffer if the permit is approved. She expressed sympathy for those affected but isn't convinced that pumping won't adversely impact the natural ecology of Bass Lake.

"We, the residents of Bass Lake, will be directly and negatively impacted if the permit is approved," Ewalt said. "Pumping water to Bass Lake will most likely result in invasive species where currently none exist, decreased water quality, flooding of wetlands and damage to personal property."

Prein & Newhof was hired by Texas Township to study groundwater flow conditions and make recommendations. Project Manager Tom Smith said lake levels have been rising quickly since September 2018.

Smith said residents who can see water rising in their basements can't wait for evaporation to happen naturally this summer. Spring rain and melted snow and make the situation much worse by then, he said.

High amounts of precipitation since 2016 has caused groundwater tables in Kalamazoo County to reach record highs in some places. A severe storm in February 2018 caused lakes to overflow their banks.

Smith said one of the main goals of the permit is to prevent adverse impacts downstream. Monitoring wells at several lakes, culverts and U.S. Geologic Survey gages will be observed.

"Obviously we need to bring the lake levels down," he said. "But, we can't have adverse impact on other folks in the township."

Still, other residents weren't convinced there will be no negative impact on downstream property owners and Boy Scouts who use the Rota-Kiwan Scout Reservation on Bass Lake. Some saw the permit as a trade that will benefit one group at the expense of the other.

Scouts expressed concern that [invasive vegetation](#) in Eagle Lake and Crooked Lake could enter Bass Lake. A December 2018 study commissioned by the township found no aquatic invasive species in Bass Lake and Scouts said they want it to stay that way. A screen should help stop invasive species from migrating, Smith said.

More than two dozen Scouts attended Monday's meeting. Texas Township Trustee Tim Brown addressed them directly.

"Your neighbors are hurting right now and they need immediate help right now," Brown said. "This is a great civics lesson and a great Scout lesson. Some truths you should know before you leave: No one is going to take your property, no one is going to ruin your scout camp and no one is going to break the law."

Meanwhile, residents said they are spending thousands of dollars to keep pumps operating at their home 24 hours per day. Some worried about the long-term impact to their property values and a chilling effect on the housing market.

Janet Hedden said she spent more than \$40,000 on pumps to keep water out. Hedden said her real estate said her home wouldn't sell for half of its market value.

"My entire livelihood is being decimated right now," she said. "We need this fixed. This has not been a couple of months for us, this has been over a year. The amount of stress that it puts on us, financially and emotionally, is insurmountable."

VanBelle said the township intends to pay for the pump equipment with a special assessment district encompassing the impacted area.

Kalamazoo County Board Chair [Julie Rogers](#) says the county has never experienced a prolonged flooding event like this, but it doesn't rise to the level of requiring a state of emergency declaration.

The emergency management process is "reactive," she said, and it hasn't been proven that significant property damage has been caused, despite possibly being on the horizon.