



**ANNUAL REPORT
2023**

**Jeffery J. Wenzel
ST. JOSEPH COUNTY
DRAIN COMMISSIONER**

**Traci Wenzel
ST. JOSEPH COUNTY
DEPUTY DRAIN COMMISSIONER**

**Michigan Drain Code of 1956
Act 40 of 1956**

An act to codify the laws relating to the laying out of drainage districts, the consolidation of drainage districts, the construction and maintenance of drains, sewers, pumping equipment, bridges, culverts, fords, and the structures and mechanical devices to properly purify the flow of drains; to provide for flood control projects; to provide for water management, water management districts, and subdistricts, and for flood control and drainage projects within drainage districts; to provide for the deposit of funds for future maintenance of drains; to authorize public corporations to impose taxes for the payment of assessments in anticipation of which bonds are issued; to provide for the issuance of bonds by drainage districts and for the pledge of the full faith and credit of counties for payment of the bonds; to authorize counties to impose taxes when necessary to pay principal and interest on bonds for which full faith and credit is pledged; to validate certain acts and bonds; and to prescribe penalties. History: 1956, Act 40, Imd. Eff. Mar. 28, 1956; Am. 1970, Act 144, Imd. Eff. Aug. 1, 1970; Am. 1973, Act 208, Imd. Eff. Jan. 11, 1974; Am. 1982, Act 449, Eff. Mar. 30, 1983.

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SUMMARY

Precipitation was relatively normal for 2023. For the past couple of years, we are not experiencing huge flood events like we have in years past. The Drain Commissioner is responsible for maintaining legal lake levels throughout the county (twelve legal lake levels) and we received several phone calls regarding lake levels over the year. I tried to maintain the court ordered legal lake levels around the county as best as possible.

During the year, 143 SESC permits were issued which includes waivers and extensions. As the County Enforcing Agent, either myself or Traci review the plans, visit the site, and issue the permit with specific recommendations if needed. We then re-visit the site periodically and after significant rain events for program compliance along with a final inspection once the project is complete. My deputy and I are both state certified for Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control and Stormwater Construction Management which allows us both to be able to issue Soil erosion and sedimentation control permits and do the inspections.

The Drain Commissioner performed drain maintenances projects on several county drains throughout the year which is less expensive for constituents in the drainage districts, for the county, MDOT, and the townships. There were twenty-two drain maintenance permits given to local farmers, utility companies, and constituents to allow them to do maintenance at their own expense on the drains. Since this is a cost savings for all of those in a drainage district (landowners, townships, state, county, and local municipalities) it is greatly appreciated by the drain office.

The Drain Commissioner's office over the course of the last few years starting in the fall of 2019 has been working with engineers and legal counsel continuously on different petitioned drainage projects. Corey Lake Intercounty Drain located in Fabius Township in St. Joseph County and Newberg Township of Cass County has been a very contentious project with many meetings and public hearings held at the Fabius Township Hall and via Zoom. There are many lakes involved with this project which is making this a long process. Our engineers have been working closely with EGLE and we are still waiting for EGLE to permit the project before we can go further into the process. The Wildcat Drain which is in the City of Three Rivers and Lockport Township, this is a petitioned project from MDOT and is paying all expenses for this project. We are also waiting for EGLE to permit this project so we can move forward. Our engineer has been working with EGLE to move the project along.

The Michigan Drain Code (Act 40 of Public Acts of 1956, as amended) is the law that governs the responsibilities of the Drain Commissioner.

GENERAL DRAIN COMMISSIONER DUTIES

- Provide for the operation and maintenance of more than 187 county and inter-county drains, platted basins, and numerous other stormwater collection systems necessary for storm water management, drainage, flood prevention and stream protection to agricultural and developed lands
- Recover the costs of operation by levying special assessments on local governments, private property owners, Michigan Department of Transportation, and others who benefit from drainage and storm water management
- Finance drain projects through the sale of bonds and notes
- Maintain records of the establishment and operation of each drain district
- Oversee the management of all drainage district financial accounts
- Review and issue approval to plans for private storm water systems in new developments and redevelopments
- The St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners has delegated the administrative duties to the St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner to oversee lake level projects. The Drain Commissioner must determine the apportionment of costs incurred and assess for maintenance of the lake level. St. Joseph County is responsible for twelve lake level control structures: Fish Lake, Lake Templene and Sand Lake, Corey Lake, Beaver Lake, Palmer and Long Lake in Colon Township, Klinger Lake, Long Lake in Fabius Township, Kaiser Lake, Pleasant Lake, Omena Lake, Clear Lake, and Eberhard Lake. The Inland Lake Level Act (**Act 146, P.A. of 1961**) requires inspection of all lake level control structures on all inland lakes that have normal levels established under this Act to be completed once every three years by a licensed professional engineer.
- On May 15, 2012 the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners delegated the Drain Office to be the County Enforcement Agent (CEA) for Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control serving all of St. Joseph County under Part 91, Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 452, as Amended. The primary objective is to protect the watercourses within the county from sediment loads caused by unchecked soil erosion. The Soil Erosion County Enforcement Agent (CEA) is responsible for the administration, management, and enforcement of the provisions of the Act. The CEA has the responsibility of overseeing all non-agricultural earth change activities within St. Joseph County, that are one or more acres in area and/or within 500 feet of a watercourse or lake.

- Serve on the Parks and Recreation Commission, Board of Public Works, Colon Lake Board, and Lake Templene Lake Board.
- Work with local property owners, county municipalities, The St. Joseph County Conservation District, The St. Joseph County Road Commission, The Michigan Department of Transportation, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Department of Environmental Quality, and the Michigan Department of Agriculture

**SOIL EROSION AND SEDIMENTATION CONTROL
(SESC)**

For the calendar year 2023 the drain office permitted 143 SESC permits including new permits and extensions. \$26,766.50 was deposited for the year for Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control. Below is the number of permits issued per township from January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023.

Burr Oak Township	3
Colon Township	13
Constantine Township	2
Fabius Township	16
Fawn River Township	1
Florence Township	0
Flowerfield Township	1
Leonidas Township	2
Lockport Township	15
Mendon Township	4
Mottville Township	1
Nottawa Township	17
Park Township	8
Sherman Township	11
Sturgis Township	1
White Pigeon Township	19
City of Sturgis	10
City of Three Rivers	19
TOTAL	<u>143</u>

PETITIONED DRAIN PROJECTS

In July 2019, the St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner's office received a petition for maintenance and improvement of the Corey Lake Intercounty Drain from the residents on Corey Lake. This intercounty drain is in Fabius Township, St. Joseph County and Newberg Township, Cass County. We have obtained all required easements for this project, but we have been waiting for EGLE to permit the project. We cannot move forward with bids until we have a permit from EGLE.

In June 2019, the St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner's office received an application and petition from MDOT for laying out and designating a county drainage district. The Wildcat Drain is in the City of Three Rivers and Lockport Township. We have obtained all required easements for this project, but we have been waiting for EGLE to permit the project. We cannot move forward with bids until we have a permit from EGLE.

DRAIN ACTIVITY

Beaver Lake Drain, Colon Township

Drain maintenance was performed by a constituent that has property on the drain to clean sediment and debris from the drain. There were also several beavers and beaver dams removed from this drain to help the flow.

Benedict Lake Drain, Colon and Leonidas Townships

The drain was plugged due to beavers. They were removed from a beaver trapper that receives our beaver permit that is issued yearly from the DNR.

Bennett & Birch Drain, Leonidas Township

A constituent with property in the drainage district received a permit from our office to remove deadfall and vegetation from the drain.

Corey Lake Drain, Fabius Township

The Corey Lake Drain is an intercounty drain with Newberg Township, Cass County. This is still an ongoing project and we have been working closely with engineers, legal counsel, EGLE, and MDARD to keep the project moving forward as best and fast as possible. We are currently waiting for EGLE to permit the project so that we can move forward and get the project out to bid as soon as possible.

Felker Drain, Park Township

Drain maintenance was performed from a local excavator to remove trees and debris to help the flow of the drain. There were permits given to Mercury Broadband to be able to cross the drain for their projects.

Garman and Foster Drain, Mendon and Park Townships

A couple of drain permits were issued to Mercury Broadband company for a couple of projects to cross over the drain. The culvert was cleaned out under M-60, MDOT reimbursed for the cost of this due to the culvert being under the highway.

Handshaw Drain, Lockport Township

A drain permit was issued to Mercury Broadband to perform work and cross the drain.

Hazzard Drain, Nottawa Township

A drain permit was issued to Mercury Broadband to perform work and cross the drain.

Herrington Drain, Burr Oak Township

A drain permit was issued to Mercury Broadband to perform work and cross the drain.

Hoover-Kelly Joint Drain, Flowerfield Township

The county Road Commission installed a new culvert which was assessed out to the drainage district. There was also maintenance done on the drain by a local excavator to clean up debris and sediment.

Jim Simpson Drain, Nottawa Township

There were permits given to Mercury Broadband to be able to cross the drain for their projects.

Leonidas, Mendon, Little Portage Drain, Mendon and Leonidas Townships

A maintenance permit was given to a local farmer to remove deadfall, sedimentation, and debris, and remove vegetation in the drain.

Marvin Drain, Colon Township

A drain permit was issued to Mercury Broadband for a project to cross over the drain.

Nottawa #1 Drain, Nottawa Township

There were beavers trapped and beaver dams removed from the drain. Mercury Broadband also received a drain permit from us to cross over the drain for their project.

Nye Drain, City of Sturgis and Sturgis Township

This was Year 3 of 5 for the Nye Drain Assessment for the project that was completed in 2020 and 2021. We assessed it out over 5 years to keep the assessment costs lower for some areas in the district.

Park Drain, Park and Lockport Townships

The drain was plugged due to beavers. They were removed from a beaver trapper that receives our beaver permit that is issued yearly from the DNR. Drain maintenance was performed in the spring to remove deadfall as well.

Portage Lake Drain, Mendon Township

A drain maintenance permit was given to a local farmer to remove deadfall, sedimentation, and debris, and remove vegetation in the drain.

Profile Lake Drain, Fabius Township

The drain was plugged due to beavers. They were trapped and removed from the drain.

Prairie River/Lake Templene, Sherman Township

Mercury Broadband received a permit from our office for a project near the Lake Templene dam.

Sadawasser Drain, Sherman Township

The drain was plugged due to beavers. They were trapped and removed from the drain. Mercury Broadband received a drain permit as well to cross the drain for their project.

Section Twenty-Eight Drain, Mendon Township

A local farmer was granted a permit to clean a portion of the drain on his property.

Smith and Tyler Drain, Mendon Township

A drain permit was issued to a local farmer to clean out the Smith and Tyler drain.

Stewart Lake Drain, Burr Oak Township

There were permits given to Mercury Broadband to be able to cross the drain for their projects.

Sweet Lake Drain, Fawn River Township

We received many complaints on this drain as it was not flowing and starting to flood properties. There were several beavers removed to help the flow. We had to hire engineers for this project and MDOT was involved as well since this drain flows underneath US-12. Maintenance was performed to get the drain to flow and MDOT covered the cost.

Thorton and Beaver Marsh Drain, Colon Township

Maintenance by a local excavator was performed on the existing drainage tile to alleviate flooding for the constituents in the district.

Tutewiler Drain, Leonidas Township

Permission was granted to property owners along the drain to remove deadfall and cut vegetation out of the drain at their own expense to help the flow of the drain.

Wasepi Drain, Nottawa Township

Mercury Broadband received drain permits to cross the drain for their projects.

Wildcat Drain, City of Three Rivers and Lockport Township

In June 2019, the St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner's office received an application and petition from MDOT for laying out, designing, and designating a county drainage district. This project is still in progress and we are currently waiting for EGLE to permit the project so that we can move forward and get the project out to bid as soon as possible.

Warren Drain, Nottawa Township

A constituent with property in the drainage district received a permit from our office to remove deadfall and vegetation from the drain.

Yaple Drain, Leonidas Township

We continue to stay in touch with legal counsel regarding this project.

LAKE ACTIVITY

Clear Lake, Fabius Township

The drain office received several calls from constituents on the string of lakes that include Long, Clear, Mud, Kaiser, and Corey. When Long Lake pumps water to lower their lake level it affects all the other lakes previously listed. If Long Lake is pumping water because their lake level is high, the other lakes are also high at that time especially Clear Lake. Many constituents become concerned about the excess water they will be receiving as their lake is already above their legal lake level. As drain commissioner, I do the best I can to control the legal lake levels without flooding everyone else out on the other lakes. The City of Three Rivers helped during the summer clean the drain out at Clear Lake to help with the flooding since we are still in the process of getting a project completed as part of the petition we received.

Corey Lake, Fabius Township

Corey Lake receives water from Clear Lake, Long Lake, Harwood Lake in Cass County, Mud Lake, and Kaiser Lake as well. The Corey Lake outlet is closely watched and maintained as best as possible. We are continuing to work with our engineers and legal counsel for a project for the Corey Lake Intercounty Drain to help alleviate flooding issues in the string of lakes in the township. Beavers were trapped out of this area as well.

Fish Lake, Sherman Township

The Fish Lake control structure must be cleaned out multiple times per year due to blockage. I watch this control structure frequently.

Klinger Lake, White Pigeon Township

The Klinger Lake Dam is maintained on a regular basis. The drain office continues to work closely with the Klinger Lake Association on any issues that arise pertaining to the Klinger Lake dam. We also had some beavers removed at the dam.

Lake Templene/Sand Lake, Nottawa & Sherman Townships

The legal lake level for Lake Templene is monitored on a regular basis. There was a 1-foot drawdown that took place in the fall of 2023, we worked with the Spicer Group to provide all of the information EGLE required and they only allowed us to lower 1-foot over the winter. Weed control and aeration also played a big role in improving the quality of the lake.

Long Lake, Fabius Township

The legal lake level was monitored weekly by either myself or members of the lake association board. When necessary, pumping occurs on the lake with approval from the Drain Commissioner. Turning the pump on and off is necessary due to the string of lakes (Long, Clear, Mud, Kaiser, and Corey) that are all affected when Long Lake is pumping water to lower its lake level. The pump ran off and on all season. Doing the Corey Lake Intercounty Drain project will also help the flooding issues with the pump.

Pleasant Lake, Fabius Township

Beavers were an issue in a lot of areas this year including our lakes. We had a few removed from Pleasant Lake outflow as well as the beaver dams.

Palmer and Long Lake, Colon Township

The Lamberson Dam is controlled by the Village of Colon personnel. The Lamberson Dam controls the water levels of Palmer and Long Lake. Repairs and maintenance are also done by the Village. I am a Colon Lake Board member and therefore I am kept up to date on any issues that arise pertaining to these two lakes.

Rawson's King Mill Dam, Leonidas Township

We are working with our engineer to prepare a lake level study which includes the proposed district for the lake level to present to the courts for review and approval. Once the court approves of the study, a legal lake level and an assessment district will be set. When this occurs, we will then move forward with maintenance of the dam to meet EGLE requirements.

DRAIN PERMITS

Drain permits were issued in 2023 for the following drains:

Bennett & Birch	Portage Lake Drain
Garman Foster (2)	Prairie River/Lake Templene
Felker Drain (2)	Sadawasser Drain
Handshaw Drain	Section 28
Hazzard Drain	Smith & Tyler Drain
Herrington Drain	Tutewiler Drain
Jim Simpson Drain (2)	Wasepi Drain (2)
Leonidas, Mendon, Little Portage, Metty Rice Drain	Warren Drain
Marvin Drain	
Nottawa #1 Drain	

Drain maintenance permits are necessary when a property owner wishes to work on a county drain at their own expense. Drain permits are granted upon approval by the Drain Commissioner. Those requesting permits are often farmers. Permits are also necessary when someone wants to cross or parallel an established county drain and replace a culvert. This often occurs when utility companies or new developments need to work in or around a county drain. Multiple conditions must be met to assure that proper drain maintenance is achieved. As Drain Commissioner, I go to inspect the drain multiple times for a project that was permitted to assure proper procedures were followed per the permit requirements.

BEAVER PERMITS

As the St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner, I apply for a permit from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources each year to trap beavers in established county drains. Once a permit is received from the MDNR, a permission letter to trap per the drain office permit is granted to multiple local beaver trappers so that beavers can be trapped in county drains, when necessary, in the off season. Thirteen permission letters were granted in 2023 and 55 beavers were trapped within our county drains. The St. Joseph County Road Commission works closely with the drain office when they see beaver trapping is necessary in county drains as well. This assistance is greatly appreciated.

FINANCIAL

ASSESSMENTS:

The following assessments were filed with the St. Joseph County Clerk on September 26, 2023:

Hoover-Kelly Joint Drain, Flowerfield Township
\$8,000.00 (Maintenance Assessment) **Year 1 of 1**

Nye Drain, City of Sturgis and Sturgis Township
\$21,197.21 (Petitioned Assessment) **Year 3 of 5**

Profile Lake Drain, Fabius Township
\$1,000.57 (Maintenance Assessment) **Year 1 of 1**

Thorton & Beaver Marsh Drain, Colon Township
\$3,000.00 (Maintenance Assessment) **Year 1 of 1**

Total Drain and Lake Assessments 2023 --- \$33,197.78

DRAIN AND LAKE LEVEL FUNDS

Below are the summaries for the drain and lake level accounts:

FUND	Balance 12-31-2023
Long Lake Revolving Fund (Fabius)	\$11,647.26
Drain Assessment Fund (*)	\$119,566.45
Klinger Lake Level Fund	\$20,263.82
Revolving Drain Fund	\$201,840.14
Revolving Drain Maintenance Fund	\$0.00
Omena Lake	\$15,794.86
Palmer & Long Lake Level Fund (Weed Control)	\$0.00
Fish Lake Drain Fund	\$6,428.30
Eberhard Lake Level	\$1,639.91
Grey Lake Level Study Fund	\$829.92
Corey Lake	\$16,077.98
Pleasant Lake	\$6,754.83
Clear Lake	\$4,711.77
Kaiser Lake	\$4,895.01
Debt Service	\$61,378.24
Beaver Lake	\$2,411.70
Lake Templene	\$45,801.95
Minnewaukan Lake	\$0.00
Lamberson Dam	\$94.05
TOTALS	\$520,136.19

DRAIN

AINSLEY	\$0.00
AMBS	\$0.01
BARTHOLOMEW/SPRING CREEK	\$2.86
BEAVER LAKE	\$5,506.23
BEAVER LAKE & EXTENSION	\$1,043.30
BENEDICT LAKE	\$1,276.49
BENNETT & BIRCH	\$795.39
BERKLEY & REED	\$451.46
BLACK RUN	\$2,013.17
BRICKER	\$121.62
BRISTOL	\$5.46
BROOKS	\$6.62
BURR OAK VILLAGE	\$1.47
BURR OAK/COUNTYLINE	\$6,104.28
CALVERT & FOUR COUNTY	\$2,374.68
CARL	\$71.84
CARTER-BOWER	\$156.32
CLARKS	\$2.72
CLYDE	\$2,132.32

COLE & DARLING	\$37.91
COLON NO.1	\$51,434.88
COOPER	\$35.70
COPENHAFFER	\$1,482.05
COREY LAKE (DRAIN)	-\$117,529.55
DAVIS TILE	\$27.98
DELONG	\$3.18
DENT EXTENSION	\$3.34
DRY LAKE	\$2.57
FABIUS NEWBERG	\$0.00
EBERHARD LAKE (DRAIN)	-\$584.44
EDWARDS-STARKWEATHER	\$1.00
FARNHAM	\$45.31
FAWN RIVER	\$26.14
FELKER	\$1,991.41
FLETCHER	\$140.50
FOUR COUNTY	\$40.20
FOUR COUNTY BRANCH	\$39.26
FOWLER	\$32.32
FREEMAN	\$5,327.99
GARMAN FOSTER BRANCH	\$6,860.62
GEMBERLING	\$230.04
GILL & TRY	\$331.88
GILLET	\$7.06
GOOSE LAKE	\$91.52
GRAVES	\$17.56
GROVER-COOHON	\$29,734.88
HALLWOOD-BRANCH #1	\$262.41
HANDSHAW	\$150.37
HASBROOK & MUMBY	\$0.15
HASSINGER	\$978.30
HAZZARD	\$245.54
HENRY	\$39.45
HEPNER-COOK	\$100.00
HERRINGTON	\$100.00
HILL	\$159.41
HIMBAUGH & NOBLE	\$21.92
HOG CREEK & BRYANT LAKE	\$606.44
HOOVER-KELLY	-\$5,787.33
JOHNSON & KELLY	\$408.59
KEIGHTLY	\$217.62
KIBBIE & AKEY	\$3.42
KISER & BICKLE	\$0.00
KLADY	\$0.00
LAIRD TOMPKINS & DOANE	\$5.31
LEONIDAS VILLAGE	\$20.59
LEONIDAS/MENDON/LITTLE PORTAGE	\$886.57
LITTLE PORTAGE CREEK EXTENSION	\$0.00
LEVERANCE & REED	\$246.59
LITTLE PORTAGE CREEK	\$200.00
LITTLE SWAN CREEK	\$5,048.11
MARL	\$100.00

MARVIN	\$121.33
MCCAULEY	\$100.00
METTY RICE	\$45.01
MOE	\$1,158.75
MOORE & BURGNER	\$19.18
MOOREPARK	\$39.49
NEEDHAM	\$100.00
NOTTAWA LOCKPORT	\$57.68
NOTTAWA NO.1	\$1,563.18
NYE	-\$40,747.52
OLDORF	\$19.99
OUTWATER	\$4.65
PARK	-\$1,151.50
PIERCE-SHERMAN	\$10.50
PLUG EXTENSION	\$44.66
PLUM	-\$499.99
PORTAGE CREEK INTERCOUNTY	\$140.50
PORTAGE LAKE DRAIN	\$37,055.81
PROFILE (LAKE)	-\$1,139.77
RAILROAD STREET & TRY	\$55.42
REED	\$317.86
REED & HAGER	\$1.44
RUMSEY	\$0.00
SADAWASSER	\$3,971.81
SAMUEL CLYDE	\$16.93
SAM METTA	\$0.00
SANBORN & HOG CREEK	\$172.01
SECTION FIFTEEN	\$100.00
SECTION FOUR	\$1,994.87
SECTION FOUR & FIVE	\$33.47
SECTION LINE	\$491.46
SECTION SEVEN	\$150.50
SECTION SIXTEEN	\$0.91
SECTION THIRTY-ONE	\$23.18
SECTION TWENTY-EIGHT	\$9.20
SHAW & AKEY	\$4.08
SIMPSON	\$206.91
SKIRVIN	\$7.69
SMITH & TYLER	\$150.00
SMITH WOODWORTH	\$37.11
SNAKE	\$614.90
STEPHENSON	\$331.32
STEVENSON	\$396.42
STEWART LAKE	\$22,166.57
SWEET LAKE	-\$200.00
THORNTON-BEAVER MARSH	-\$2,142.27
TRECKLE	\$2.64
TUTEWILER, TOWN LINE & PLUG	\$2,786.94
WAITS	\$13.38
WANEER	\$87.29
WASEPI	\$671.85
WILCOX	\$744.55

WILDCAT	\$96,375.48
WINGER	\$0.00
WOOD & WATSON	\$2,188.39
YAPLE	-\$12,504.37
YEATTER JOINT	\$1.93
YODER	\$82.45
TOTALS*	\$119,566.45

(*) This fund is the total of the individual drain accounts included with this report.

PROFESSIONAL

Besides office hours and field inspections, the Drain Commissioner also attended the following meetings and conferences:

MACDC – Winter Conference
 MACDC – Spring Southwest District Meeting
 MACDC – Summer Conference
 MACDC – Fall Southwest District Meeting
 Friends of the St. Joe River Association Meetings-Board Member
 Board of Public Works Meetings
 Park and Recreation Board Meetings
 Colon Lake Board Meetings
 Lake Templene Lake Board Meetings-Treasurer
 Lake Association Meetings
 Michigan Lake and Stream Annual Meeting
 Midwest Aquatic Plant Management Society Conferences
 Jones SGA Conservation Member
 Farm Bureau Annual Meeting
 Other various County, Township, Village, and City Meetings

**Thank you for the privilege of
 serving as your
 County Drain Commissioner**

**Jeffery J. Wenzel
 St. Joseph County
 Drain Commissioner**