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DIVISION OF FISHERIES
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COOPERATING WITH THE
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FISHING ACTIVITY ON LAKE ST. HELEN, ROSCOMMON COUNTY,
DURING THE 1954 DUCK HUNTING SEASON

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By

FISH DIVISION

Kenneth E. Christensen

The Institute for Fisheries Research was requested to make observations on the fishing activity on Lake St. Helen, Roscommon County, T. 23 N., R. 1, 2 W. during the 1954 migratory waterfowl season (October 1 through November 24). The Conservation Department had received complaints that use of the public fishing site by anglers during this period was interfering with the duck hunting of the St. Helen Shooting Club.

The St. Helen Shooting Club claims exclusive hunting rights on this body of water, these rights having been deeded to the Club by the St. Helen's Development Company. St. Helen's Development Company was organized in August, 1902, and had title to all property fronting on Lake St. Helen. The St. Helen Shooting Club was organized in March, 1904, as an association, and they purchased the hunting rights at this time. The St. Helen Shooting Club gained title to much of the lake property by payment of taxes on these properties. All properties sold by the St. Helen's Development Company (later organized as Carters, Incorporated) were sold with the reservation of shooting rights for the St. Helen Shooting Club.

Lake St. Helen is 2500 acres in size and is divided into three basins, called First, Second and Third lakes.

The Shooting Club has established 20 blinds around the shore of the lake. These are either shore blinds, or floating blinds anchored within 250 yards of the shore. There is a blind located directly in front of the public fishing site, about 250 yards off shore. There are 5 blinds located along the west shore of First Lake, which boats must pass when going from the river (South Branch of Au Sable River) to Second or Third lakes.

The Conservation Department made several attempts to acquire an access site for anglers on Lake St. Helen and in 1950 was able to purchase lake frontage from Mr. and Mrs. William Mogle and agreed in the deed that use of the site would not include hunting privileges. A sign stating "Warning, hunting rights on this lake are privately owned. Boating and fishing must not interfere with hunting of waterfowl during open season. Department of Conservation," was erected on the site prior to the 1950 duck hunting season.

The St. Helen Shooting Club complained to the Conservation Department that persons using the fishing site in the fall were interfering with their hunting. In 1953 the Shooting Club requested that the fishing site be closed during the duck hunting season. The Conservation Department refused this request and the Shooting Club suggested that they could get a court order to close the site. The Conservation Department felt that it was necessary to make observations on the use of the public fishing site and on the actions of those persons using the site.

The author was instructed to make this study and to record all instances of anglers using the public fishing site during the Club's shooting hours. Records were kept of the angling activity of persons gaining access to the lake through the fishing site, and in addition, of anglers gaining access through private property. The author, or some other Department employee,

made a check of anglers on the lake during 41 of the 55 days in the period of October 1 to November 24, including all 41 days when the club permitted hunting; the 14 days not checked were week days during the early part of October during which fishing undoubtedly was negligible.

The St. Helen Shooting Club restricted hunting during the first 20 days of the season. They hunted only from opening time until 11:00 or 11:30 a.m. each day and only on Thursday through Sunday of each week. They did not hunt on October 1 due to the 12:00 o'clock noon opening, or on October 20 due to the 10:00 a.m. opening hour. After October 21 the members and guests were allowed to hunt during all legal shooting hours.

The first anglers to use the public fishing site to gain access to Lake St. Helen during a hunting day arrived on October 7, at 12:30 p.m. Two anglers fished from shore for a short while and caught no fish. There were no hunters on the lake, since hunting hours stopped at 11:30 a.m. on this date. The following day, October 8, two archers from Adrian, Lenawee County, launched a boat at the site at 10:30 a.m. and fished for pike for one hour. They did not approach any duck blind in use by hunters. They flushed two black ducks which were not shot at by hunters.

Two parties made use of the site on October 9. Three shore anglers were at the lake at 10:30 a.m. They spin-fished with night crawlers for about one hour. The blind in front of the fishing site had been in use during the morning but the hunters had left at 10:30 a.m. (before the fishermen arrived). A boat was launched from the public fishing site by a man and woman from Jackson. They fished for bluegills from 4:00 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. They did not interfere with any duck hunters. The fishing site was not used during shooting hours again until November 7. Two anglers launched a boat from the fishing site at 1:15 p.m. They anchored about 100 yards from the fishing site and fished until 3:30 p.m. They caught no fish. There were no duck hunters in the vicinity. There were 2 shore fishermen at the site at

10:00 a.m. on November 8. They fished for one-half hour and caught no fish. There was no further use made of the public fishing site by anglers during the duck season.

The author contacted 7 anglers who had fished a total of 10-1/2 hours and caught no fish.

Anglers can gain access to Lake St. Helen during the fall at several points other than the public fishing site. These include Mogle's, Lakeview Motel, and Dick and Leila's on the South Branch of the Au Sable. On October 2 there were six boats on the lake in the early morning; two were from Mogle's and the others from undetermined points. A total of about 25 boat trips, originating from points other than the public fishing site, were recorded during the entire duck season. No instances of intentional interference with duck hunters were observed. The hunters complained that one or two angling parties had disrupted their hunting on October 2 by trolling in front of their blinds or anchoring nearby and casting. No boats were launched from the fishing site on this date.

The St. Helen Shooting Club members were bothered by anglers who gained access through private property rather than through the public fishing site. The author's impression was that the Club exercises some control over these private property access points in that the owners have agreed to pull all boats out by October 1. There was one individual on the lake who appeared to disturb waterfowl more than all other observed boats combined. This was the caretaker from the St. Helen Shooting Club. The club members themselves, in moving from one blind to another, put up ducks which provided shooting for other club members.

Two boats were moored at the public fishing site during most of the duck season. One was unused the entire time that it was present. The other

boat was used to remove a boat dock from the tourist park at the north end of First Lake. The owner of the boat went fishing after dark the evening of October 22, presumably for bullheads.

Assistance was given in these observations by Jack Hammond, Area Biologist for Region II, and by two Fisheries Research Technicians from the Institute, Donald Parsons and Harold Wilson, Jr. This assistance was given during the latter part of the study, after it was apparent that little or no activity would occur during the author's absence.

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