

China's Pride  
Keep it Alive



# CHINA LAKE ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

Volume 21, Issue 1

Summer 2008

## China Lake Association Board of Directors

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## President's Report

This past year was a significant one in regards to work that was done in the China Lake Watershed. The China Region Lakes Alliance, (CRLA), of which the lake association is a founding member, was awarded a new grant for continued lake work. Boat launch screenings took place every weekend at both the China and East Vassalboro boat launches by students trained by the CRLA to prevent invasive plants from entering the lake. Over the winter, work was begun on a buffer strip improvement program called *LakeSmart*. Two of our directors will be heading up this valuable program. You can read more about the *LakeSmart* program in this newsletter. There are few lakes in the state of Maine that have as much work done in the watershed as China Lake, but we still have seasonal algae blooms. Why is this? China Lake has 10,654 pounds of phosphorus entering the lake's waters every year, (2005 Colby Study). This phosphorus is the "fertilizer" for the algae blooms. Over \$169,000 was spent during the last two-year grant period to address erosion areas. This work stopped 61 tons of sediment from entering the lake, but this equals only 50 pounds of phosphorus! It costs about \$3400 to keep one pound of phosphorus from entering the lake, despite the fact that the CRLA, on behalf of the China Lake Association, has done some of the most successful and cost-effective projects in the state to diminish the algae blooms. What else can be done?

Some have thought that reducing water levels or working to improve the wetlands around the lake would provided the needed wide-ranging solution. These areas have been investigated and ruled out. There is now a new hope for the "big fix:" alewives. Alewives are a sea run fish that spawn in lakes and then return to the ocean. The Directors of the China Lake Association have seen a presentation by the Maine Department of Marine Resources about how introducing sea run alewives may help to improve water quality over time. The CLA Directors are weighing this issue for China Lake and will report on this at the upcoming CLA Annual Meeting.

I would like to thank everyone who donated money to the CLA over the past year in an effort to meet our fundraising goal of \$7500. This money is vital in working towards our goal of improved water quality. We are trying to improve our web site and are sorely in need of some expertise in this matter. If you can help to get it up and zooming, let us know. You could become the CLA "webmaster."

All of us involved with the CLA are sad to see Martha Hicks step down as a director as she prepares to relocate to Florida full time. Martha and her husband Tom have been active in the CLA since its founding in 1987. We thank them for their work.

Dave Landry, President

david.landry@yahoo.com

## Annual Meeting

Thursday, August 7

7:00 p.m.

China Primary School

\*Discussion of Alewife  
Water Quality Program

\*Town Revaluation Q&A

Refreshments

## Something Fishy

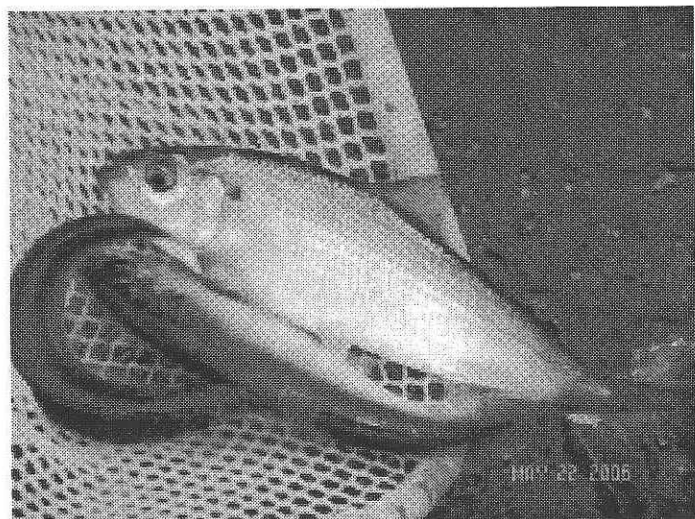
Can the introduction of alewives, a small sea run fish, help improve the water quality of China Lake? The people at the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) think so. At the urging of Webber Pond President, Frank Richards, the Directors of the China Lake Association heard a presentation on alewives by the DMR. Richards says Webber Pond has noticed a marked improvement in water quality in recent years, and he believes that alewives are the reason. Webber Pond has had some of the worst water quality of any area lake until the past few years. In time past, the water quality in Webber has been so poor that the water has resembled green paint by August. Alewives were introduced into Webber Pond about 8 years ago, and now there is a heavy annual run of these 6 inch long fish up the Kennebec, through Seven Mile Stream, and into Webber Pond each spring. The adult alewives spawn in the lake and then migrate back to the ocean. The newly hatched alewives spend one summer in the lake and then migrate to the ocean the first fall. As the small alewives grow, they eat the microscopic animals, zooplankton, that feed on algae. The alewives take up phosphorus in the course of their growth and when the fish migrate out to sea they take the phosphorus with them!

Models developed by the DMR calculate that in China Lake, up to 1200 pounds of phosphorus could be removed annually by the alewives. From previous studies, 2000 pounds of phosphorus would need to be removed annually to stop the algae blooms in China Lake. Nothing done in the lake or its watershed to date has come close to removing 1200 pounds of phosphorus from the lake annually, so the alewife hypothesis offers an interesting option. As with anything, there are two sides to the story. With alewives, there are reports of paradoxical declines in water quality and negative impact on native fisheries. Alewives are being introduced into lakes in the Kennebec River Watershed as part of a Gulf of Maine restoration program. The alewives are food for many of the valuable fish in the gulf such as cod and haddock. Introduction of alewives into a lake such as China would takes 6-8 years to accomplish and could be stopped along the way if unexpected negatives arise. The Directors of the China Lake Association will attempt to obtain as much information as possible before making a decision on whether or not to recommend introduction of alewives into China Lake. As part of the information gathering process, we hope to have a presentation on the topic and a Q&A session at the CLA annual meeting this summer on Thursday, August 7th.

Stay tuned.



*Alewives prior to release into Webber Pond.*



## Buffer Strip Improvement

The China Lake Association is beginning a buffer strip improvement project and will offer camp owners free landscaping advice, cash, free labor, and discount plants as an incentive for China residents to improve the buffer strip around China Lake. The buffer strip is the vegetated land between the shore, buildings, and roads. This area “buffers” the runoff from buildings, gutters, and driveways, helping to reduce phosphorus runoff into the lake. A well vegetated buffer strip with a mix of shrubs and trees reduces phosphorus runoff and maintains a natural looking shorefront. The 2005 Colby College China Lake Study looked at the 460 lakefront lots and found that 35% of lake lots had poor buffer strips and 13% had unacceptable (worst category) buffer strips. Only 11% of the buffer strips on the lake had “good” buffer strips. A lawn is a poor buffer strip, particularly if the area is steeply sloped. A good buffer strip does not have to obscure the view to the lake or be difficult to maintain. A healthy buffer strip can add value to one’s property, fit in with the natural look of the shorefront better, and be easier to maintain than a poor buffer strip.

CLA Directors Marie Michaud and Nancy Woodbrey are heading up the *LakeSmart* Program on China Lake this summer. *LakeSmart* is a state sponsored program that focuses on buffer strip improvement with an array of incentives for the camp owner to improve the lake’s buffer strip. On China Lake, the incentives include free consultation to assess the property owners’ buffer strips and suggest specific plantings and landscape techniques that may help improve the quality of the buffer strip. Matching cash up to \$200 per property will be awarded to purchase plants, and a discount voucher to Fieldstone Gardens is available. The Youth Conservation Corps will do the landscaping free of charge. In total, a buffer strip improvement package can be worth up to \$500 per property. This is not an enforcement program, so camp owners do not need to worry - a poor buffer strip will not result in any negative consequences - only the chance to improve your buffer. Camp owners with excellent buffer strips will be awarded a *LakeSmart* emblem to display on the shorefront. To participate in this program, please contact Marie or Nancy. Space is limited. Marie Michaud, 968-2668 or [marieswp@me.acadia.me](mailto:marieswp@me.acadia.me)  
Nancy Woodbrey, 872-2614 or [nwoodbrey@fc.wtvl.k12.me.us](mailto:nwoodbrey@fc.wtvl.k12.me.us)

## Wetlands Committee Report

The China Board of Selectmen authorized and funded a study of the wetlands around China Lake. The Wetlands Committee was headed by selectman Neil Farrington and the end result of the committee’s work was a well done report by wetlands and environmental consultant Curtis Bohlen. The finished report was presented to the public in December of 2007 and can be viewed or downloaded from the Town of China’s website by searching under “Boards and Committees” subgroup Wetlands Committee.

The charge of the Wetlands Committee was to determine whether the wetlands around the lake were deteriorating and also whether the wetlands were a significant source of phosphorus to China Lake and in part responsible for the ongoing algae blooms. In short, the conclusions were that over the past decade the wetlands were stable and, “there is little to suggest that deterioration of lakeshore wetlands are a significant source of nutrient (phosphorus) to China Lake.” Also stated was that the wetlands were not, in the distant past, a significant source of phosphorus to the lake. Changes have been noted in the wetlands over time due to increases in the lake’s water level that occurred 30 years ago.

The report is a valuable piece of information and well worth reading. It adds to our knowledge on one aspect of China Lake’s ecology. Our thanks to the selectmen and committee members for their efforts.

## China Region Lakes Alliance News

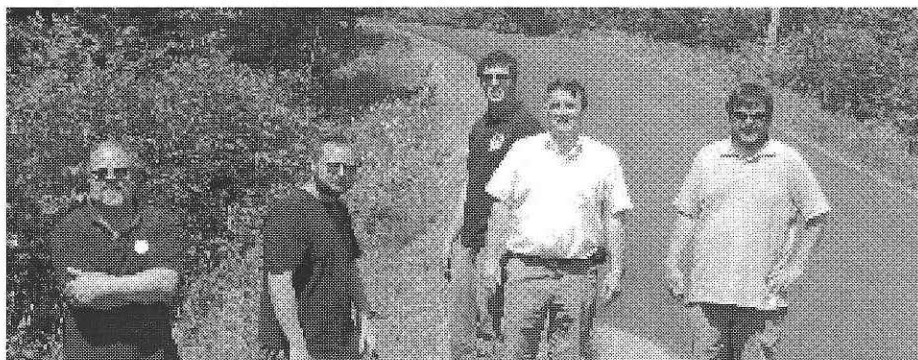
The China Region Lakes Alliance was formed in 1995 by the China Lake, Three Mile Pond, and Webber Pond Associations along with the Towns of Vassalboro, China, Windsor, and the Kennebec Water District with the mission of working to improve water quality in member lakes. The work that is done by the CRLA falls into 4 broad categories: technical assistance and design work for major erosion control projects, hands on erosion control work on smaller projects, free land owner consultations, and boat launch patrols to prevent the introduction of invasive plants into our lakes. The organization has thrived and has been a model for other lake-based organizations in the State. This past year the CRLA completed twenty erosion control projects in the watersheds of member lakes. Forty landowner consultations were provided free of charge regarding erosion control issues and lake health topics. Nearly eight hundred boats were inspected prior to launch to prevent the spread of invasive plants.

China benefitted from one of the most significant erosion control projects to date. Tarybelu Lane had been identified as a site of significant soil runoff and phosphorus pollution to China Lake as far back as the year 2000. The twenty-two lot development is accessed by a steeply pitched gravel road. During the spring and after major rain events, water would run down the road into the stream at the bottom of the development, carrying tons of soil a short distance into China Lake annually. In the spring of 2007, the CRLA approached the residents of Tarybelu Lane with the offer of free technical assistance and some financial help if the road was rebuilt in a fashion to limit the erosion. The response was overwhelming - \$110,000 was raised from development residents, \$39,000 in state grant money was available, and local funds through the CRLA ensured the completion of this \$153,000 project. Today the road is designed and paved so that dump truck loads of gravel no longer wash into the stream and then into the lake annually. Tarybelu Lane is a wonderful example of how a small amount of local funding can be used to accomplish very significant projects.

The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) is up and working again this year. Corps Director, Peter Wilkens, has assembled an energetic group of area high school students for another summer of erosion control work around the lakes. Peter is a sophomore at Wells College in Aurora, New York majoring in environmental sciences. Peter is available to do free property owner consultation regarding erosion control problems and plantings along the shorefront that would be beneficial to the lake. Many times Peter can arrange partial funding for erosion control problems.

Through Peter's efforts, the CRLA obtained a \$3000 grant from the State of Maine to continue the Courtesy Boat Inspection Program (CBI) that has been done in the past. Each weekend, crews of students inspect boats at both of China Lake's boat landings before allowing them to launch. This is done in an effort to prevent the introduction of invasive plants into China Lake. An invasive plant such as Eurasian Milfoil would devastate a lake such as China Lake. The plant grows so thick that access to the shore in many shallow areas of the lake would become difficult if not impossible.

When you see student members of the YCC or the CBI Program working this summer, please thank them. They are working to protect our lake.



The CRLA can be contacted through Peter Wilkens at email: [peterwilkens@gmail.com](mailto:peterwilkens@gmail.com) cell: 660-5270.

Scott Pierz, Peter Wilkens, Justin Hiebert, Jim Hart, and Jeff Freddenberg inspect Tarybelu Lane after paving project.

## Property Revaluation

The Town of China is in the midst of a town wide property revaluation that will be finished this summer. The revaluation will most likely result in significantly higher assessments and, unfortunately, higher tax bills for shorefront properties. Town Manager Dan L'Heureux has worked hard to keep folks on the lake informed about this process and was at last years CLA annual meeting to address the topic and answer questions. When the revaluation is done and the new tax bills arrive later this summer, many may have questions about the process. Mr. L'Heureux has prepared the following informative article on the topic. Keep it on hand for future reference.

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### Understanding Your Assessment

#### **ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT RISING PROPERTY TAXES?**

There are two parts of the property tax system: valuation and taxation. The assessors' office determines the value of your property; your taxing authority determines the amount your property will be taxed. It is the combination of these two parts that determines how much you will pay in taxes.

#### **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ASSESSOR AND/OR ASSESSING AGENT?**

The assessor is responsible for estimating the value of your property, which determines your assessed valuation. (The assessors do not determine your property taxes.) Instead, the assessed valuation determines the **overall share** of the property taxes you pay; it is therefore important that your assessed value be **accurate and fair**.

#### **HOW IS YOUR PROPERTY VALUE ESTIMATED?**

Your property value is estimated by the assessor first examining and collecting information on the physical characteristics of the property. Physical characteristics may include, among other items, the square footage of land and improvements, the number of bedrooms and bathrooms in a home, a garage, and the nature of amenities such as swimming pools and fireplaces. In the case of an income property, the assessors estimate the amount of income the property might generate. On some properties, nonphysical characteristics such as easements can affect the value of improvements. **Location is a key characteristic affecting value.**

Using a mass appraisal system, the assessors analyze sales, income, and cost data to arrive at an estimate of value. In some instances where warranted, the assessors may rely more heavily on sales or income or cost data to estimate the value. Furthermore, the assessor may find in some instances that particular properties cannot be analyzed through the mass appraisal approach and require individual appraisals to estimate the value.

#### **WHAT CAUSES PROPERTY VALUES TO CHANGE?**

The most obvious factor is that the property changes; a bedroom, garage, or swimming pool is added, or part of the property is destroyed by flood or fire. A change in use can affect the property's value, such as an apartment building being converted to condominiums.

#### ***The most frequent cause of a change in value is a change in the market.***

If a town's major industry leaves, property values may collapse. A shortage of detached houses in a desirable city neighborhood can send prices to ridiculous levels. In a recession, larger homes may remain on the market for a long time, but more affordable homes are in demand, so their prices rise. In a stable neighborhood without any extraordinary pressure from the market, inflation can increase property value.

#### **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF TAXING AUTHORITIES?**

Taxing authorities decide the amount of the property tax that is owed each year, including whether the overall property tax rises, falls, or stays the same. Subject to state and local limitations, taxing authorities can determine property taxes either by **adjusting the total dollars requested** or by **adjusting (or not adjusting) the tax rate**. The amounts set by the taxing authority in combination with your assessed value determine how much you pay in taxes.

*Property Revaluation (cont. from p. 5)***WHAT ARE THE GROUNDS FOR AN APPEAL?**

If you believe the estimated value of your property is incorrect, you will want to know:

- How the assessors value property,
- How to gather information about your property and similar properties,
- How the appeals process works and what the deadlines are,
- You have a responsibility to furnish accurate information about your property to the assessor(s).

An *assessment appeal* is not a complaint about higher taxes. *It is an attempt to prove that your property's estimated market value is either inaccurate or unfair.* You may appeal when you can prove at least one of three things:

1. Items that affect value are incorrect on your property record. For example, you have one bath and not two, or you have a carport and not a garage, or your home has 1,600 square feet and not 2,000 square feet.
2. The estimated market value is too high. You have evidence that similar properties have sold for less than the estimated market value of your property.
3. The estimated market value of your property is accurate but inequitable, because it is higher than the estimated value of similar properties.

**NOTE:** You will not win an appeal simply because you think your taxes are too high. This is an issue one must discuss with the officials who determine budgets. However, you may be eligible for tax relief or exemptions. The assessors' office can give you information about exemptions.

**THE APPEALS PROCESS - STEP BY STEP**

**Procedures and Deadlines:** When you receive your assessment notice, read it for instructions about deadlines and filing procedures. Please call the assessors' office if this is not clear. A missed deadline or incorrect filing may cause an appeal to be dismissed or denied.

**Informal Review:** The first step in an appeal is usually an informal meeting with someone in the assessors' office; this also might be handled by telephone or e-mail or on-line. Information on the particulars for setting up an appointment should be included with your assessment notice, along with similar information for the entire appeals process.

*The information in the assessors' office, including the property characteristics and assessments of similar properties, is public information. This information may be helpful in preparing your appeal.*

**Preparation:** Please prepare for the meeting by finding your property identification number on your assessment notice. Use this number to view or obtain a copy of your property record from the assessors' office. Review the facts on the property record. Is the architectural style correctly stated? If not, a recent photo of your home will help correct the information. Check the square footage of the living area, the size of the lot, the number of bathrooms and bedrooms, the presence or absence of a garage or finished basement, the construction materials, the condition of the building, and so forth. Gather as much information as possible on similar properties in your neighborhood. Obtain the sales prices on these properties. Use the addresses of comparable properties to review their property record forms, which should also show their appraised values. Compare the features of these properties with yours.

**The Meeting:** The purpose of the informal review, which is not yet an appeal, should be:

- To verify the information on the property record form,
- To make sure you understand how your value was estimated,
- To discover if the value is fair compared with the values of similar properties in your neighborhood,
- To find out if you qualify for any exemptions,
- To be sure you understand how to file a formal appeal, if you still want to appeal.

The person conducting the meeting will probably review your property record form with you and give you information about comparable properties. This is the time to present any information you have gathered. There may not be a commitment to a change in value at this meeting, even though you may have uncovered an error or the assessment appears to be inequitable. If this is so, find out when you might expect to hear from the office.

*Kindly view the assessors' office as an ally, not an adversary.* Employees of the office should be trained, polite, and helpful. A respectful approach will result in a more productive, helpful and informative meeting.

*Property Revaluation (cont. from p. 6)*

**Formal Appeal:** Residential appeals are often settled at the local level. If you are not satisfied with the results of your informal review, you have several more opportunities. The first level of formal appeal is usually to a local board. Your appeal is more likely to succeed if you present persuasive evidence that comparable properties in the same neighborhood are assessed for less than yours. Copies of property record forms on comparables, with records of respective estimated market values or sales prices, are your best defense. Note any differences between your property and the comparables and point out these differences. A recent appraisal of your own property can be good evidence of its value. ***The appeals board is only interested in the fairness and accuracy of the value placed on your property, not in whether you can afford to pay your taxes or whether taxes are too high.*** If successful, it is good to be certain when you might expect to receive results from this level of appeal and to which and how many tax years the result may apply.

**Additional Levels of Appeal:** If you disagree with the local board's decision, additional administrative or legal remedies may be available. In some cases, it may be advisable for you to seek legal or professional representation in pursuing your claims. You will be told of the additional remedies if applicable.

Very Respectfully,  
Town of China

*The China Lake Association would like to thank the following local businesses for their generous contributions last year.*

**China Village General Store  
The Landing**

**Lakeside Country Market  
Lakeview Lumber**

**Ray Haskell Ford**

*We would also like to thank our private members for their donations as well. As you know, your contributions go a long way in helping us fulfill our mission of improving the water quality in our lakes and streams. Next year, we would like to recognize each donor by name. If you would like your contribution to be anonymous, please check the box in the membership form below. Thank you.*

## Membership Form - Summer 2008

### China Lake Association

Please renew my membership.

I am a new member.

I would like my donation to be anonymous.

Annual Family Membership, \$25

Bass, \$50

Trout, \$75

Loon, \$100

Eagle, \$500

other, \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, ST, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

*Please make check payable to "China Lake Association" and mail to P.O. Box 6215, China Village, ME 04926.  
Thank you for your tax-deductible contribution!*

China Lake Association  
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China Village, ME 04926

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## **China Lake Association Annual Meeting**

**Thursday, August 7, 2008, 7:00 p.m.**  
China Primary School

### **Agenda**

1. Welcome - Dave Landry, President CLA
2. Alewife Introduction in China Lake - ME Department of Marine Resources
3. Q&A on alewives
4. President's Report
5. Restoration Report - Peter Wilkens
6. Treasurer's Report- Bruce Daniels
7. Election of Officers
8. New Business
9. Q&A on Town of China Revaluation - Dan L'Heureux, Town Manager