Diving In
A Lake Level Update

From Leslie Meyers,
Antrim County Drain Commissioner
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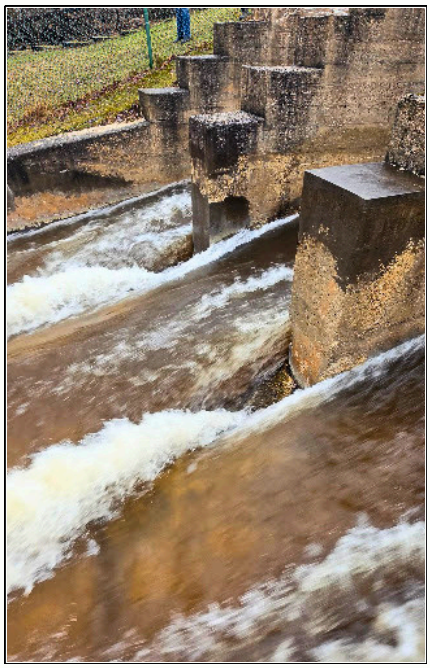
A Stressful Spring at the Bellaire Dam

On Sunday, April 12, four to seven inches of rain fell on the frozen ground and iced-over lakes of the Upper Chain of Lakes. That afternoon, County staff began twice daily inspections of the Bellaire Dam, which is more than one hundred years old.

The following day, it was noted that the existing spring at the base of the dam's eastern embankment had shifted from clear seepage to sandy. This high-concern event triggered the emergency installation of a repair designed by dam engineers and approved by EGLE.

The repair consisted of a **filter blanket** of multiple types of materials, which worked as a trap to prevent additional sand from seeping out. During the installation and restoration, as much vegetation remained in place as possible, and equipment was kept off the embankment.

Dam officials continued to monitor the water levels and the dam as the repair was made. When rising water came within 12" of overtopping the dam, roughly 50 volunteers helped install sandbags along the east and west embankments. At this point, the "Ready" status of the State of Michigan's evacuation protocols was invoked.



Outdoor furniture, dock sections, kayaks, tree branches, etc. were being swept into the fast-moving water. Members of the volunteer Certified Emergency Response Team were stationed at Bellaire's walking bridge to alert staff about debris that could harm the dam.

Dam officials monitored the water levels 24/7 throughout the week. Knowing that water from the Upper Chain can take multiple days to reach the Bellaire Dam, the "Ready" evacuation protocol for areas immediately south of the Bellaire Dam remained in place until Sunday, April 19.

Water levels remain above normal, and heightened shoreline erosion is still a risk. **Many property owners are still dealing with the impacts of flooding.**

Engineered designs to renovate the Bellaire Dam are at 60% completion. The Antrim County Drain Commissioner is working to obtain a funding source for renovation costs.

Elk Rapids Hydrodam: Update

During the April high-water events, Antrim County dam staff was also monitoring the Elk Rapids Hydrodam and its Spillway. Though there was no immediate danger, there is a heightened level of concern about the safety and stability of the Spillway.

An agreement was recently approved by the Village of Elk Rapids, Elk Rapids and Milton Townships, and Antrim County. The agreement outlines funding sources for a preliminary engineering study that will provide an analysis of alternatives rehabilitating the Spillway.

Thank You

The 2026 spring flooding was an unprecedented threat to the Bellaire Dam and to the lives of those directly downstream of the Dam. First responders, emergency personnel, and volunteers demonstrated extraordinary dedication, courage, and compassion and **worked tirelessly to protect lives and assist those in need** under challenging conditions.

These efforts exemplify the highest standards of selflessness and public service. In honor of those efforts, we thank the following—and anyone who we missed—for their commitment to the well-being of our community.

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Antrim Review | Antrim Women's Alliance | Patrick Atkinson
Catherine Atkinson | Jim Bailey | Sherry Bailey | Zachary Bates
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