deep shock. Under the Indian River exit sign was a huge sign: BURT LAKE BEACHES CLOSED.

As we continued on in disbelief, we made our way to Devoe Beach only to see the big warning sign: "BEACH CLOSED. NO SKIN CONTACT. BY ORDER OF HEALTH DEPT #4." We made our way to the state park and there was big sign: "BEACH CLOSED." We knew about the beach closures in Traverse City. And we knew about the Manistee closure in 2019 due to leaking septic and drain fields but we never thought it would happen in Indian River.

Indian River looked like a ghost town. Very few cars. Parking lots at local businesses empty.

While this story is fiction, the science shows it is not only possible but eventually probable. Pay particular attention to Bridge Magazine "Higgins Lake’s crystal waters are under threat. Blame poop (and other stuff)" in the September, 2019 publication. The latter article cites extensive science by Michigan State University. Our local ecosystem is similar – only larger. The similarities to our waterway are too great to ignore. For more science see Tip of the Mitt Water Shed Council’s Cheboygan County Report.

While a sewer system in some areas will cause improvement, it is not enough. Cheboygan County needs to enact ordinances that require septic system inspection on transfer of property. And within the Lake and Stream Protection District which includes all property within five hundred (500) feet of the shoreline’s ordinary high-water mark for a river or lake, we need an inspection ordinance that requires septic inspection every five years.

There are too many makeshift sewage systems or old failing systems along Burt and Mullet lake, as wells at the Little Sturgeon, Sturgeon and Indian Rivers. – a pipe leading to an oil drum, hollowed-out pit, or other jury-rigged drum. Or a system that has aged beyond its useful life and leaks into the water or water table.

You do not have to be “tree huggers” or environmental activists to want to protect our beautiful waterway.

Don’t stick your head in the sand – you may not like what is in it.

Bob Kramer
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