

September 5, 2026

To: Scott Tucker, Superintendent, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
Cc: Tim Stein, Supervisor, Cleveland Township
Brendan Mullane, Manager, Leelanau County Road Commission

RE: Beaver Dam Maintenance in Shalda Creek

The Little Traverse Lake Association (LTLA) supports the efforts of Cleveland Township, the Leelanau County Road Commission (LCRC), and the National Park Service (NPS) to improve the Traverse Lake Road culvert area to increase flow capacity and establish a long-term beaver dam maintenance policy. We appreciate the recognition that beaver dams are a contributing factor to elevated water levels that can affect property and public infrastructure while also impacting the health of the watershed. Having unrestricted stream flow ensures that the addition of more culvert area, which is also important to the watershed clearance and needed, can function as designed without impediments.

Based on the engineering studies and water-level data collected over the past decade, LTLA's position is that Shalda Creek must remain free of restrictions, including beaver dams, on an ongoing basis. The objective should be prevention of hydraulic restriction—not intervention after elevation of water levels.

Shalda Creek Is Critical to the Greater Watershed

Shalda Creek is the primary drainage channel for a large watershed that includes 670-acre Lime Lake, Shetland Creek, 640-acre Little Traverse Lake, and thousands of additional acres. Because of the gradual topography of Shalda Creek, restrictions within the creek can have significant effects throughout the entire watershed. Little Traverse Lake is dependent on Shalda Creek for drainage. As water levels in Shalda Creek rise or fall, Little Traverse Lake responds accordingly.

Gosling Czubak has analyzed water-level data and watershed responses over a number of years, documenting the effects of beaver dams. Most recently, Gosling Czubak has completed a topographic survey and hydraulic modeling study. Taken together, this body of work supports a clear conclusion: Shalda Creek should remain free of beaver dams and other significant impediments so that the stream can function as intended and downstream road infrastructure can operate properly. LTLA believes that conclusion, rather than a reactive water-level trigger, should be the foundation of the long-term maintenance policy.

Why Proactive Maintenance Matters

Beaver dams do more than temporarily raise water levels at a particular location. They create restrictions in the stream, collect sediment and debris, reduce effective channel capacity, elevate water far upstream, and can reduce the rate at which water moves through the watershed during significant rainfall events.

When water levels in Shalda Creek are elevated by beaver dams, the effects extend beyond the immediate location of the dam. Water can accumulate in the Shalda Conifer Swamp, the watershed's water table can rise, and the capacity of the watershed to absorb and move additional water is reduced.

Importantly, water-level concerns begin well before water reaches structures. Rising water levels can elevate the water table, saturate soil and root systems, increase shoreline erosion, and potentially affect septic systems. Waiting until water reaches a predetermined level associated with property or infrastructure impacts means the watershed has already been operating under elevated conditions for some time. In LTLA's view, that is precisely what a sound maintenance policy should prevent.

A healthy watershed also depends on normal seasonal fluctuations. Allowing beaver dams to persist can prevent the watershed from reaching its normal summer and winter low levels. Those lower levels provide important capacity to absorb and move water during significant fall and spring precipitation.

The watershed also takes time to recover after a major rainfall event. When it is already elevated and saturated because of beaver dams, there is less capacity to clear additional water. When water in Shalda Creek was previously backed up to the bottom of the CR 669 bridge, it took approximately a month to clear after a dam was removed. This experience demonstrates why removal only after water levels have become problematic or reach a certain trigger point is not an adequate management strategy.

LTLA's Recommendation

LTLA recommends that Shalda Creek be recognized as “Watershed Maintenance Area” (as a concept) with the explicit objective of maintaining unrestricted stream flow, including the removal of beaver dams, for the benefit of the greater watershed. We believe this is the appropriate management framework given the creek's critical drainage function and the documented consequences of restrictions within it.

We recognize the NPS responsibility to manage its Wilderness Area and provide undisturbed priority areas where beavers can thrive. That responsibility, however, should not preclude proactive management of a portion of the watershed whose hydraulic function extends beyond the boundaries of the National Lakeshore. Shalda Creek serves a much larger watershed, and conditions within the creek have direct consequences for communities, property owners, and public infrastructure outside the park. For that reason, Shalda Creek should not be treated as a priority area for the long-term establishment of beaver dams. Shalda Creek is not a suitable location for another beaver created lake like Narada or Kelderhouse.

LTLA requests that beaver dams in western Shalda Creek (upstream of Narada Lake outlet intersection) be routinely monitored and removed early on before they materially restrict flow, alter normal watershed responses, or carry the watershed into the fall and spring precipitation seasons with artificially elevated water levels.

This is the fundamental difference between a proactive maintenance policy and a reactive, trigger-point approach. LTLA believes the management objective must be to prevent beaver dams from changing normal watershed conditions and responses—not to wait until water levels have risen sufficiently to demonstrate that a problem has already occurred.

Moving Forward

LTLA supports:

- Keeping Shalda Creek free of beaver dams and other significant impediments;
- Establishing a regular and consistent beaver dam inspection and early maintenance program;
- Continuing to document watershed conditions and water levels through LTLA's automated monitoring system.

We appreciate Cleveland Township, LCRC, and the NPS recognizing that beaver dams in Shalda Creek affect the greater watershed beyond the boundaries of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. LTLA looks forward to working with all parties to establish a proactive, long-term approach that maintains the free flow of Shalda Creek. We believe that approach is both warranted by the available engineering and water-level evidence and necessary to protect the watershed from avoidable impacts. A policy that waits for water levels to reach certain levels before taking action does not adequately address the underlying problem.

On behalf of the LTLA Board of Directors,

Scott Siegel, President
Little Traverse Lake Association

*Little Traverse Lake Association is a 501(c)(3) organization
whose mission is to preserve and protect Little Traverse Lake and its surrounding watershed*