

Management Plan - History

The primary lakes discussed in this plan include: the Tiger Cat Flowage, a 1,911 acre impoundment created by a county-owned dam; Big Round Lake, a 3,054 acre lake known for high water quality and recreation; Little Round Lake, a 230 acre lake that is directly connected to Big Round Lake with a county-owned dam to regulate water levels on Big and Little Round lakes; and Osprey Lake, a 208 acre lake that is relatively undeveloped with a large portion surrounded by wetlands, tribal lands and a natural outlet to Lac Courte Oreilles.

Historically Big Round Lake was connected to Little Round Lake by a wetland area and channel. There was also an outlet from Little Round into Osprey Lake (formerly known as Squaw Lake) and from there to Lac Courte Oreilles by a natural watercourse east of the constructed channel under Carlson Road. As the area became more populated the wetland area between Big and Little Round was filled for construction of Highway B, leaving a small channel between the lakes. The natural outlet from Little Round was also filled for a private road.

In the 1930's there was a prolonged drought that depleted lake water levels in the region. In 1937 Sawyer County requested permission to divert surplus water from the north fork of the Chippewa River to Round Lake to restore water levels that had dropped as much as 10 feet below previous levels. Round Lake was considered a premiere lake, vital to tourism and the tax base, and the restoration of normal water levels was a high priority. As a solution, the Tiger Cat dam was designed to create a flowage and raise water levels enabling water to reach Round Lake by diversion canals linking small lakes. Canal No. 1 joined the Tiger Cat Flowage to Burns Lake, Canal No. 2 joined Burns to Placid Lake; Canal No. 3 conducted the water from Placid to a natural depression or slough; and Canal No. 4 connected the slough with Round Lake and included a control dam to regulate the amount of water into Round Lake (Lake Placid Dam – DNR File Number 57.31). The project was completed in 1940 and water levels did return to normal on Big Round. The gates on the Placid Control Dam were closed on October 28, 1940.

Although the control dam remained closed, water levels in Big Round continued to rise. In order to maintain normal water elevations an outlet for Big and Little Round lakes was necessary. In 1942 two 36" culverts were installed at Hwy. B between the lakes and by 1943 an outlet channel from Little Round to Osprey Lake was constructed under Carlson Road with a dam (DNR File Number 57.34) at the outlet of Little Round. A normal water elevation of 77.0 feet was established by the Public Service Commission in 1941. During this period the outlet stream from Osprey Lake was spanned by a bridge on World's End Resort Road. In a 1950 correspondence from J.C. Cavill, General Superintendent of the Department of the Interior to the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, a reference is made to two 24" culverts under World's End Resort Road. In 1970 this portion of the road was abandoned and reconstructed slightly downstream as

part of the new County Highway NN. There are currently two 36" culverts at the stream crossing.

Initial normal elevation of the pond created by the Tiger Cat Dam (DNR File Number 57.30) was 90.0 feet. In 1949 application was made to raise the level to 90.5 to provide better navigation between the various lakes in the Tiger Cat system. During the subsequent hearing, concerns were raised by individuals on Round Lake and Lac Courte Oreilles and a further study of how water levels between the three systems are related was requested. The hearing was held open to allow an experimental level of 90.5 to determine effects on other lakes. In June 1950 the Public Service Commission concluded their findings and granted the 90.5 level provided: diversion from Tiger Cat to Round Lake requires permission from the Public Service Commission; the diversion control structure at Lake Placid must be locked; and the partially constructed channel from Little Round to Osprey Lake be kept blocked at the elevation of natural ground level to allow excess water to flow towards Osprey Lake by natural ground contour.

In 1983 Sawyer County requested permission to raise the authorized level of the Tiger Cat Flowage to 91.34 feet (approximately 10 inches) to again improve navigation. Following a hearing the request was approved in 1984.

There is a long history of complaints regarding water levels on Big Round, Little Round and Osprey lakes. Several agencies including the Public Service Commission, Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Natural Resources have made surveys and reviewed the various orders and historic records pertaining to the water levels. In addition, water level concerns are impacted by upstream levels on the Tiger Cat Flowage and diversion system as well as downstream issues voiced by the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe and the Town of Bass Lake Board of Supervisors. The levels of the various lakes are affected by rainfall, groundwater seepage, and the increased impervious surfaces that are a result of development. There are also multiple control points which affect levels with the primary control dependent on the hydraulic situation.