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County seeks engineering study of Round Lake water system

Terrell Boettcher
 Sawyer County Record
 Wednesday, May 10th, 2006 11:15:58 AM

In an attempt to clarify the options on how the Round Lake watershed can be managed to satisfy the various stakeholders, Sawyer County's Land and Water Conservation Committee on May 4 approved a proposal from a Madison engineering firm.

The proposal now will go to the Round Lake Management Plan Task Force for review, amendment and a recommendation to the county board.

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For a cost of \$7,000- \$10,000, Montgomery and Associates will:

- Perform an accurate study of the elevations of the Little Round Lake Dam and the culverts carrying Osprey Creek under County Highway NN. The drop between them is "quite flat," about three inches, said Robert Montgomery, a

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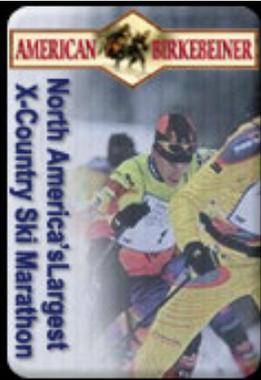
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public engineer with the firm.

- Modify the existing hydraulic model of the Round Lake system to simulate water levels and flows during the projected 100-year maximum flood for the following alternatives:

- 1) Maintain the system in its current condition;
- 2) Fill in the Lake Placid diversion channel, make the Little Round Lake outlet structure completely passive so that the water level could not be raised or lowered, and possibly modify the Highway NN culverts;
- 3) Make the minimum modifications necessary to reduce the 100-year flood level to an acceptable elevation to be determined by the county, considering modifications of the Little Round Lake Dam, the channel between Little Round and Osprey Lakes and the Highway NN culverts.

The survey of the Little Round Lake Dam and Highway NN culverts would be subcontracted to Northern Wisconsin Based Engineers (NWEB) of Hayward.

County staff would perform the survey work. The regional flood elevation study has been performed by Carthel and Associates of Birchwood, but has not yet been approved by the DNR pending requested modifications.

Montgomery and Associates also would work with the county to estimate construction, operation and maintenance costs associated with each option.

The Round Lake Watershed Task Force includes representatives of Sawyer County, the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe, the Department of Natural Resources and property owner associations on Round, Little Round and Osprey lakes and the Tiger Cat Flowage. The task force will meet again on June 1 to continue work on developing a lake management plan.

If the task force and county board approve, Montgomery and Associates would complete its study within 60 days.

“We have gotten an official letter from the Round Lake Property Owners Association that by and large they are satisfied with the water level as it is, but they want the county to do something if possible in the event of extreme high water,” said County Clerk Kris Mayberry.

The Tiger Cat Flowage Property Owners Association has stated that they don’t object to filling in or removing the Lake Placid Diversion Channel. “Its utility is suspect,” Mayberry said.

Likewise, the Little Round Lake Dam does not work as a control structure,

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Mayberry said. "If the water is really low and you want boards in there (to try to raise the water level), it won't do you much good because the water at times does not even reach the sill." It's free-flowing.

There is so little drop in elevation in the channel between Little Round and Osprey Creek Lakes that "it's debatable whether you would do any good by making it any deeper," Mayberry added. Osprey Creek is an intermittent stream that flows beneath Highway NN and into Lac Courte Oreilles.

'Excessive time'

DNR Northern Region dam regulation specialist Frank Dallam said that a while back the county contracted for a hydrologic study, dam failure analysis and regional flood elevation for the Round Lake watershed system. "But it's taking an excessively long time to get that done."

Dallam said the DNR has reviewed the submitted model and requested changes before approving it. "Most of the modeling for the 100-year flood elevation is set up for Round Lake. However, it needs to come into code compliance," he said.

Dallam said the Montgomery study "would be an extremely useful thing, at least to get the 100-year flow approved." He said action is "not far away at all. The survey work (which has been done by NWBE/Carthel) is mostly done and has a high level of accuracy. But you will need some modeling to evaluate the NN culverts to begin with and any other changes you propose.

"I would strongly recommend" going ahead with the Montgomery study, Dallam added.

"I don't think anybody is advocating that we lower Round Lake," Mayberry said. "It's just to keep it from getting too high at times. We are not considering yanking out the dam," he added.

Riedmann added that "We are very sensitive to the tribe's concerns" about Osprey Lake as well as to the other property owners' concerns.

Round Lake shoreowner Jim Hausman suggested the Montgomery study be expanded to explore other options. He said the current proposal has only one option: making the outlet a passive waterway.

Riedmann said the task force can discuss other options and amend it before returning the proposal to the county board. Mayberry said the county is looking at other options.

Aquatic specialist

The committee recommended hiring Kristine Maki as county aquatic invasives coordinator.

Pending approval by the county board on May 18, Maki will work with lake associations and others to help prevent and stop the spread of invasive plants and organisms.

Maki is being hired under a \$17,000 grant from the state. The other \$10,000 is coming from the county.

Pacwawong problem

County Conservationist Dale Olson said the Army Corps of Engineers is looking into why the Pacwawong Flowage north of Seeley dropped two feet overnight recently. "We're very concerned about the wild rice out there," he said. The flowage has a private rock roller dam.

Olson said that "We have lots of shoreline (restoration) projects designed and ready to go in, but we do not yet have DNR permits; there is a two to three-month wait. That's getting to be very frustrating."

Olson added that coconut-fiber logs are less expensive and longer-lasting than rock riprap for shoreline stabilization; they last 9-10 years before starting to degrade.

Olson said two shore owners have filed lawsuits contesting court-ordered mitigation plans (planting trees or other vegetation) prepared by his department.

Committee member Fred Zietlow said Wisconsin's public trust doctrine regarding water rights is "very vague" and needs to be clarified by cases brought before the Supreme Court.

Olson said his department's tree sale went very well. "We buy them by the thousand and put them into lots of 10. People buy them and put them onto shorelines. We like to see that," he said.

National Resources Conservation Service Rusk and Sawyer Conservationist Mike Koehler said heavy rains last fall have "washed a lot of soil into our rivers and lakes." One reason is that a lot of dairy farm pasture and hay

ground has been converted into fields of cash-crop corn and soybeans, he said.

Koehler said the state-wide soil survey is supposed to be on-line this month (by late June for Sawyer County data). That will cut out a lot of paperwork for himself and the many people requesting soils information, he said.

Chris Worden, of Medford, Pru-Ru-Ta Resource, Conservation and Development Council executive director, outlined projects which the nonprofit corporation has funded in Sawyer County. It is funded by the counties and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Projects include a ski trail at Ojibwa Park and development of the Eagles Landing Park on the Namekagon River. Also, the council provides technical assistance to farmers on grazing projects.

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