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County awaits word from LCO on proposed projects

Will LaBreche

Sawyer County Record

Wednesday, May 09th, 2007 11:06:47 AM

The Sawyer County Land and Water Conservation Committee continues to await word from the LCO Tribal Governing Board as to how to proceed with the Round Lake watershed project.

At the committee's meeting on Monday, two informational meetings were scheduled with the intention of providing to the public the most up-to-date information concerning the Round Lake project. The first meeting will be held on June 29 at the Hayward High School and the second meeting is slated at the LCO Convention Center on July 6, with the times of both meetings set from 6 - 9 p.m.

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"I think we owe it to people to tell them what we've been doing," said committee member Shirley Riedmann. "I think people have a right to know

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that. These are informational meetings; they aren't to come away with any decisions."

Unofficially it was discussed that perhaps the tribal governing board would like to see nothing happen with that area, including the removal of an aged beaver dam, although the county is uncertain at this point because they have yet to receive an official word from the tribal board.

"We've asked them (tribal board) to provide (their official response on the project) by our May 17 county board meeting," Riedmann said. "If they send us a letter requesting other alternatives, then that's official. We have to have something in writing — they don't have to do anything other than say 'this is what we prefer.' Unless we get a letter with Louis Taylor's signature, then we have nothing official from the tribe. Until we get something official, whether it's alternatives or opinions or anything, we can't move forward."

Riedmann said that the meetings are important because the county has "spent over \$100,000 for an engineering study and I think people have a right to know what's in that study."

After addressing this item and the rest of their agenda, the committee moved into a discussion about the wilderness lakes classification.

As an update, county conservationist Dale Olson outlined the criteria for wilderness lakes including, as an addition to the criteria, consideration of how existing developments on lakes will determine whether a body of water can be protected under the designation.

"Basically the lakes that don't have many houses on them are the ones we're trying to protect," Olson said.

When questioned by committee chairman James Bassett about how the criteria address the effects of phosphorus-loading on lakes, Olson said "the big thing with sensitivity would be lake type.

"Drainage lakes are naturally sediment traps," he said. "Spring and seepage lakes are not — they are much more vulnerable to nutrient-loading."

Olson asserted that the creation of wilderness lakes criteria is essential to manage development on smaller lakes.

"We learned on Lovejoy Lake last time (when) a development was being planned — I can't even imagine how many phone calls that generated; Indian Lake, the same way: A development was planned and we had to do something to address these," Olson said. "Every time one of these little lakes is going to get developed, all bloody murder breaks loose."

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“The bottom line is the zoning committee was holding the line on trying to protect the lakes, but we don’t have a good hook to hang our hats on,” Bassett, who is also chairman of the zoning committee, said.

When the discussion turned to development density, property taxes and minimum lot sizes, Olson said “when we start popping in 50 houses on some of these small lakes and they (the lakes) start turning pea green, which the potential is absolutely there, then it’s valueless for everybody.”

“Then it boils down to one or the other,” said Bassett. “Are you worried about the income to the county or are you worried about the quality of the water and the land?”

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