

Lake Placid canal closing may not be OK'd by DNR

Related to Round Lake water level issue

by Terrell Boettcher, News Editor

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Recommended changes in the management of Round Lake's water level remain "in limbo" pending tribal approval for new culverts at the Osprey Creek crossing of Highway NN, according to Sawyer County Land & Water Conservationist Dale Olson.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) states that the spot is acting as a dam and is requiring that the county install new culverts that are six inches lower than the present culverts, Olson said. Beaver dams in the channel above the culverts actually control the water, he added.

The LCO tribe has objected to removal of beaver dams and to lowering the culverts pending a study of the project's impact on wild rice production.

The next step would be to close the Lake Placid diversion canal, Olson told members of the Sawyer County Comprehensive Planning Committee on Nov. 19.

Originally constructed in the 1930s, the canal was intended to divert water from the relatively houseless Tiger Cat Flowage to help raise the water level in Round Lake in times of drought. Seventy years later, "we think that might not be such a good idea," Olson said. The two water bodies have separate watersheds and the Tiger Cat is full of the invasive species purple loosestrife, he said.

Now that the shores of the Tiger Cat are more populated, if he were to propose diverting water from it, the residents "would hunt me down," Olson added. "I'm not willing to do that."

Last February, the county applied to the DNR to abandon the canal, and the "official word" from DNR says its environmental analysis of the proposal should be ready this coming spring, Olson said. But "I don't think" that will happen, Olson added.

An engineer also has recommended installing a new, wider, notched run-of-the-river concrete weir dam at the Carlson Road outlet on Little Round Lake.

Olson said the county still hasn't identified the culprit or culprits who last June welded steel plates across the base of the Little Round Lake dam. Using a truck-mounted welder, the culprits welded into place one-foot-high, five-foot-long, one-inch thick steel plates that perfectly fit the twin wooden-walled bays and stoplog holders, he indicated. "Nobody witnessed" this illegal act, he added.

Since then, the plates have been removed and the sheriff's department has them as evidence, Olson added. While helping to remove the plates, a land and water intern slipped, fell and severely injured his hand, he added.

"Those beavers don't understand that 1941 order" from the Public Service Commission that established a Round Lake water level regime, said Mic Isham, environmental director for the LCO Conservation Department.

As part of the county's plans, it would seek a change in the 1941 PSC water level order to reflect natural variations in lake levels. This past summer, the lake level was generally low compared to previous years.

The Round Lake Property Owners Association (RLPOA) states the county and DNR have "stalled out" and the county has "opted out" of any further responsibility for managing the level of the lake. Since the DNR doesn't actively participate in managing lake levels, "Round Lake is being abandoned," the RLPOA states.

At its October general membership meeting, the RLPOA passed a resolution that it would support vacating the 1941 PSC order only if the lake would be actively managed to an elevation of 1344.875 feet (77.125 local datum), which is about a foot lower than the ordinary high water level and a foot higher than it has been the past two years.

Also, the RLPOA asks that the current DNR minimum flow interpretations be "significantly relaxed" in the spring and early summer so that water can be stored in Round Lake for public use and reasonable minimum flow later in the season.

That way, no dredging and no beaver dam removal would be required, which supports the LCO Tribe's position, they add. Public access to Round Lake and property owner values would be restored. A higher lake level also would improve the lake's ecology, since less milfoil-enhancing sunlight would penetrate to the bottom.

The RLPOA states that placing one or two extra 2-by-6-foot boards at the Carlson Road dam would help save lake water for both those interested in maintaining the late-summer level on Round Lake and the required minimum downstream flows.

Invasive species

Olson told the committee that the county has received a two-year \$67,612 grant to continue the countywide aquatic invasive species coordinator position held by Kristy Maki.

The county has sponsored grants for Callahan, Osprey, Clear and Connors lake associations to chemically treat Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM), and for the Courte Oreilles Lakes Association (COLA) to treat curly-leaf pondweed.

Other lakes which have been surveyed and mapped for the presence of EWM have been Clear, Big and Little Round, Musky Bay on Lac Courte Oreilles, Spider, Teal and Smith. The county has assisted several lake associations in applying for grants to fund aquatic plant management plans.

What's unique about Sawyer County compared to many other counties is that the land and water conservation department here can respond rapidly to an identified infestation of EWM, Olson said.

"We jump in our county-owned boat, which has a (chemical) spreader on it, and we're there within a week," Olson said. "I have a pesticide applicator's license and we treat these little hot spots before they can spread."

The county also has reared and released beetles which eat the nuisance weed purple loosestrife.

Shoreline protection

Together with the Sawyer County Lakes Forum, Olson started a program called Conservation Star Homes. "Conservation ambassadors" have been trained to go out and give advice to lakeshore home owners on enhancing their shoreline and protecting water quality.

In 2008, the land and water department installed four shoreline protection projects on the Chippewa Flowage and two on Lac Courte Oreilles with matching grant funds.

The county owns and maintains three parks: Nelson Lake Wayside, Eagle's Landing on the Namekagon River and Hatchery Creek.

The county owns 23 dams, but only knows where 17 of them are, Olson said. The other six are "so deep in the county forest, we don't know where they are or were supposed to be." Most of the 23 dams are quite small, he added.

Hydro-electricity

Hayward resident Ernie Martinson asked if the county has considered retrofitting dams to generate electricity. Olson replied that "there has been talk and (the idea has) been dismissed quickly. It doesn't pay fiscally. Most of our dams are low-head." One higher-head dam is on Nelson Lake, but "we can't get enough water to go over the spillway; we certainly couldn't turn a turbine there," he added.

The Fishtrap dam on the Chippewa River's East Fork "would have minor possibilities of working out," Olson added.

Mic Isham said the tribe has been approached about its land next to the Billyboy Dam on the Couderay River. But "It (hydro generation) wouldn't jibe with fish management or

wild rice production, because you would hold water back to maximize power production,” he said. “We’ve been arguing about those issues on the Chippewa Flowage for a long time.”

Septage spreading

Edgewater resident Linda Zillmer asked Olson what he recommends be done about the problem of finding land to spread human septage and a hauler being fined recently for over-applying waste.

Olson replied that if septage haulers comply with their DNR permits, “everything will be fine. It has to go someplace.”

City of Hayward Public Works Director John McCue said the city “probably won’t ever take any septage from anybody. We have a pond system and don’t test (it) enough that we could trust septage haulers. They could go get something toxic and dump it in our system, and our ponds aren’t set up to do anything about it. We don’t have the capability of keeping track of the haulers.”

Comments: terrell.boettcher@mx3.com