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Committee deals with Lake Placid canal, Grimh Dam issues

by Terrell Boettcher
 News Editor

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At its Oct. 8 meeting, Sawyer County's Land & Water Conservation Committee discussed ongoing issues concerning the proposed closure of the diversion canal between the Tiger Cat Flowage and Round Lake and the abandonment of the Grimh Dam in Radisson.

Frank Dallam, Department of Natural Resources water regulations and zoning engineer, said an environmental assessment (EA) of the county's request for a permit to close the Tiger Cat Flowage diversion canal and dam near McClaine Road has been drafted and is under internal review.

The plan will include a project profile and requirement for a coffer dam to make sure water doesn't leak from upstream during what Dallam said would be a "major excavation." The county's consulting engineer, SEH, will work with County Conservationist Dale Olson to present the desired plan. The plan will go to DNR water specialists for approval, then will go directly to a contested-case hearing, Dallam said. The Round Lake Property Owners Association opposes abandoning the canal and dam unless there are comparable adjustments in the minimum flow going out of Round and Little Round lake at the Carlson Road dam and channel. Aerial photos from the 1930s show a natural stream existed between Lake Placid and Round Lake before the diversion canal was built.

As of Oct. 8, the water level in Placid Lake was at least one foot below the culvert that runs beneath McClaine Road.

On another issue, a delegation from Radisson attended the meeting to reiterate their desire for restoration of a dam and lake on the Couderay River in Radisson, formerly known as the Grimh Dam and Flowage.

The DNR has indicated it cannot reverse the abandonment process requested by the dam's owner, North Central Power Company. However, interested prospective buyers can begin the process of applying for a new water control structure, with or without hydroelectric generation capability.

Phil Quade, Town of Radisson chairman, said private wells in the village are down 45 percent and "We're in trouble without that water in the river to keep the flowage up."

Prospective purchaser Scott Goodwin has had structural engineers examine the dam and "their (analysis) is totally different from the DNR's. We can't figure out why they (the DNR) pulled the plug on that dam," he said.

DNR officials say they are following through with North Central Power (NCP) Company's request to abandon the dam. Dallam said a number of evaluations of the dam performed by NCP or FERC showed it would cost \$200,000 to \$700,000 to repair the dam.

Due to structural concerns, NCP was required to draw the lake down. They tried to find a new owner for the dam, then decided to abandon it. They chose to drop their Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license and applied to the DNR to abandon the dam. The deadline to complete the abandonment process is March 1.

Quade said the "chances of someone getting permits for a new dam are just about nil." He said the cost of repairs prohibited the Village of Radisson from taking over the dam.

NCP has offered to donate its estimated cost of removing the dam to any responsible party willing to obtain the required approvals to take over the dam. The company plans to wait as long as possible to give anyone with an interest in taking over the dam a chance to do so.

The committee agreed to a draft a letter to the Sawyer County Board, which will be sent to DNR Secretary Matt Frank. The county is asking the DNR to "work with and assist Sawyer County in efforts to rehabilitate the Grimh Dam. It is felt that the concerns of the Radisson community are well-placed regarding the environmental and economic aspects related to the loss of the dam."

The letter says the county is willing to work with private firms that may

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have an interest in the dam that may be of value to the community and the county.

"I feel the county has an obligation to attempt to represent the public" on this issue, board chairman Hal Helwig said. "It's a limbo issue now."

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