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County doesn't want to change Highway NN creek flow

by Terrell Boettcher
 News Editor

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At a meeting last week, the Sawyer County's Land & Water Conservation Committee agreed they don't want to do anything to change the culverts carrying Osprey Creek beneath Highway NN, which is one of the outlets for water in Round and Little Round lakes.

Committee chairman Jim Bassett sent a letter to the Department of Natural Resources asking for their guidance and leadership in resolving the culvert situation. They're perched above the historical streambed, resulting in their status as a dam. Also, they were installed without state permits back in the early 1990s.

Sawyer County initially agreed to resolve the situation by re-installing the two existing culverts approximately four inches lower, applying for a Trans 207 highway permit and installing a third corrugated metal pipe. The

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county highway department was granted this permit approximately a year ago, but has not taken action due to opposition from the LCO Tribal Governing Board.

Bassett said the tribe and county have worked closely and cooperatively on highway issues within reservation boundaries. It is with respect to the tribe's recommendation that the culverts be left

as is that the county has not completed this project, he said.

County Conservationist Dale Olson said there are many culverts in Wisconsin that are perched and probably acting as a dam.

LCO Conservation Department specialist Dan Tyrolt said the tribal council's position is that the culverts are not a problem and the council is adamantly opposed to anything being modified on those culverts.

He said that because of the hydraulics, it's not feasible to do anything to try to change the current water flow system on Round Lake.

Committee member Dean Pearson said it would be a waste of time and money for the county to do anything with the culverts. There's been no water in the channel for at least a year.

Bassett said, "We seem to be stalemated here in the county. We're asking the blessing from the DNR to let us back off and forget the whole thing."

Tom Aartila, Upper Chippewa Basin water regulation supervisor for the DNR, said he will talk to DNR dam personnel and the northern director and will get back to the committee. If the county applies for a dam permit, it will have to maintain the structure.

In other water-related issues, Tyrolt said there could be a wintertime fish kill on Musky Bay on Lac Courte Oreilles due to decaying vegetation and oxygen depletion in the deep hole.

Tyrolt said the tribe is working cooperatively with the UW-Superior

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aquaculture facility to collect female and male walleyes from the Chippewa Flowage and is spawning them early. The partners will raise extended-growth walleyes for stocking in the flowage to help walleyes compete better with largemouth bass, he said. The walleye population has "crashed out there," and the tribe supports efforts to reduce the largemouth bass population on the flowage, he indicated.

Tyrolt asked when the county will install new six-foot culverts carrying Grindstone Springs Creek beneath Highway E west of the LCO Commercial Center. The current culvert is undersized, and the new pipe will facilitate the tribe's efforts to get a better flow of water and restore the brook trout population in Grindstone Springs Creek, he indicated.

The tribe has blown out 12 beaver dams in the channel and installed a culvert beneath Grindstone Springs Road, so the only remaining restrictions to a natural channel are the Highway E culverts.

Another culvert of concern to the tribe carries a trout stream beneath Highway E at Reserve near St. Francis Mission, Tyrolt said. The current culvert is perched a foot above the stream, and in the summer trout can't move upstream, so the tribe rescues them from a pool and moves them upstream. He asked if a new culvert could be put there. These two streams contain some of the few remaining brook trout populations on the reservation.

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