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County gets update from DNR on Round Lake issues

by Terrell Boettcher

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News Editor

During their meeting at DNR Northern Region headquarters in Spooner last week, Sawyer County's Land & Water Conservation Committee received an update on two issues dealing with Round Lake water management:

- The redesign and replacement of culverts that carry Osprey Creek beneath Highway NN. Sawyer County Highway Commissioner Gary Gedart said the county hired SEH engineers to do the project hydraulics, which involves lowering the two existing culverts one foot, extending them by 10 feet and adding a third culvert. The engineer's report was reviewed by the



DNR, which notified parties including the LCO Tribe and approved a permit to the county, Gedart said. When he contacted LCO Tribal Governing Board member Rusty Barber two years ago, Barber indicated the board did not agree with this.

DNR Upper Chippewa Basin water program supervisor Tom Aartila said Northern Region Director John Gozdziński met with

tribal leaders about the project last April, but he hasn't heard any official decision from them. Gozdziński indicated "it's now in the county's hands." The DNR says the current culverts are serving as a dam and need to be lowered.

Gedart said he already ordered the culverts two years ago, when prices were lower.

- Aartila said an environmental assessment has been drafted on the permit requested by the county to close off and fill in the 70-year-old diversion canal between Lake Placid and Round Lake. He said he hopes a notice seeking public comments would be ready by the end of the week. The DNR then will respond to any comments within a two-month period.

DNR water regulation and zoning engineer Frank Dallam will review the plans submitted by the county. Committee member Doug Mrotek asked if the work could begin this summer. Aartila replied that "I assume you could unless it goes to a contested-case hearing. Then it could be a lengthy time before it's all done."

County Conservationist Dale Olson reported that The Tiger Cat Dam failure analysis, pending for more than three years, has been deemed "a higher priority" for 2010 by the engineer doing the work.

That statement is "a slap in the face," Olson said. "It's unacceptable." The committee voted to forward the matter to County Corporation Counsel T.J. Duffy for further action.

Septic problems

Olson reviewed the list of recommendations from the Sawyer County Citizens Committee on Private On-Site Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS), which were received by the zoning committee recently.

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Kris and Ron Vieceli, who own and operate Northwest Sanitary, said most septic waste in the county is applied to farm fields. But as time goes on, with nutrient plans becoming more stringent, farmers are running out of places to put it. Volumes are increasing "astronomically" as old septic systems are replaced with holding tanks, Mrs. Vieceli said.

"The answer we've been given is to charge customers more," she said. "We work in two economically-disadvantaged counties, and charging our customers more is not an option. And with the spring thaw just around the corner, hauling the waste to Rice Lake (for treatment) is not viable for our customers or us. We need the county to act on this."

Committee member Shirley Riedmann asked if septic waste could be spread on county forest lands. Thompson said applying it "would be tough." County Forest Administrator Greg Peterson said spreading waste "would only work on a few sites (plantations)." And public access would have to be closed off to these sites, he added.

Bart Vitcenda of Exeland suggested that the county build a centrally-located treatment facility for septic waste and said "It could be very good revenue for the county." Exeland farmer Pasanen added that "If you get the phosphorus out of that water, I want it. I'll irrigate it."

Olson said it would cost \$800,000 to \$1 million for a stand-alone treatment facility in Radisson. The Village of Winter and City of Hayward are required to upgrade their current waste treatment plants and "are willing to add something on to take care of additional gallonage," he said.

County Board member Warren Johnson said Oneida County has proposed using septic waste to water and fertilize fast-growing hybrid aspen plantations. "There's a chance for a revenue stream," he said.

The committee asked Olson to start working on solutions to the septic problem.

Milfoil, wildlife

The committee voted to support a Town of Sand Lake resolution to prohibit boat traffic in a small portion of a bay on the northeast side of Whitefish Lake near Sunset Lane. Olson said boat traffic there stirs up a patch of Eurasian watermilfoil, which allows fragments of the invasive species to re-root.

The county's resolution will allow enforcement by the sheriff's department, Olson said. All that the recreation officer has to do is snap a picture of the offending boat and issue a citation.

The committee voted to approve \$57,863 in total claims from farmers for wildlife damage to crops in 2009. That figure is "way down," Olson said.

Exeland farmer Scott Pasanen said standing corn close to his house is "moldy in the center and the deer won't eat it."

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