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## Round Lake property owners and LCO tribe contend with county over water system

Terrell Boettcher

Sawyer County Record

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Round Lake's existing and potential water control points and an engineer's analysis of the effects of a once-in-100 years flood on lakeshore properties continue to be bones of contention for lakeshore residents.

That became clear during the Jan. 25 meeting of the Round Lake Management Task Force, which is trying to come up with a plan to manage high water and low water to preserve the lake's ecology, private property values, and the treaty rights of the Lake Superior Chippewa tribe to access and harvest fish and wild rice.

*Story Continues Below*

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Complicating the water flow and water level issues are the effects of the area drought, now in its fourth year.

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The task force includes representatives of Sawyer County, the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the Round Lake, Osprey Lake and Tiger Cat Flowage property owners' associations.

Participants heard an analysis from Sawyer County's consulting engineer, Bernard Lenz of Short Elliott Hendrickson (SEH), on the effects of a once-in-100 years flood and regional flood elevation (RFE), which would replace the current FEMA flood elevation maps.

A technical team has recommended maintaining a "passive" water control system as it is now. There would continue to be no boards in the county-owned control structure on Carlson Lane at the outlet of Little Round Lake and the dam may be abandoned.

Ten years ago the county took all of the boards out of the control structure on Carlson Lane at the outlet of Little Round Lake in order to maintain downstream minimal flow requirements.

The twin 48-inch culverts owned by Sawyer County which carry the waters of Osprey Creek beneath Highway NN downstream toward Lac Courte Oreilles would be modified with a DNR permit. The DNR now considers the culverts to be an unauthorized dam. Also, the county would continue to remove beaver dams and other obstructions in the stream channels.

With permission from the LCO Tribe, the county recently removed a berm on a snowmobile trail which crossed Osprey Creek below Highway NN and obstructed stream flow.

The Round Lake Property Owners Association (RLPOA) has officially stated they are opposed to a passive system and want to keep the boards in place at the Carlson Lane control structure. They say the county is not fulfilling the requirements of the 1941 order from the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) to maintain the lake level between a specified minimum and maximum.

RLPOA representative Tom Kintzinger said the property owners want to be protected from both low water and high waters. RLPOA member Al Reinemann said Round Lake on the average is above the levels specified in the 1941 order and if current levels are not consistent with those, then the order needs to be changed.

Reinemann added that association members are "100 percent opposed to a passive system. Prior to 10 years ago when the county took over, a representative property owner would take out or add boards in the Carlson Lane dam as needed." Now due to the drought, the lake is 20 inches below

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## Columnists

normal, and boards need to be reinstalled in order to keep water in the lake during spring runoff and help bring the water level back up, he indicated.

LCO Tribal Governing Board representative Mic Isham said the tribe wants to “get back to a natural lake system,” which would include removing the Carlson Lane dam and Placid Lake diversion canal and restoring wetland drainage. He indicated that because of the drought, musky spawning beds on Round Lake are now on dry land.

Sawyer County Board member Shirley Riedmann, who chairs the Land and Water Conservation Committee, said it is “not the intent of the county to lower the water level but to determine if it’s at the appropriate level.” More engineering modeling is needed before a decision can be made, she indicated. “We need to come up with something that makes sense, a reasonable compromise solution.”

County Conservationist Dale Olson and other agency personnel are recommending that Sawyer County seek state approval to permanently close off the dam and diversion canal between Lake Placid (Tiger Cat Flowage) and upper Round Lake. It was originally constructed in the late 1930s to divert water into Round Lake during droughts.

DNR water regulations specialist Dave Kafura said the Tiger Cat Flowage and Round Lake have “drastically different watersheds” and water qualities and there is a potential to contaminate Round Lake with exotic species if water is diverted from the Tiger Cat. Also, any diversion into Round Lake would bring the water in the Tiger Cat/Chief River system below the state-ordered level, he said.

The county has to maintain the run-of-river at the Tiger Cat Dam, and the Placid diversion canal is a “fifth wheel that has no reasonable use,” Kafura added. The order governing the Tiger Cat prohibits any diversion into Round Lake, he indicated.

DNR records at Hayward show a deficit of 24.4 inches of rainfall (including the water in snow) below average over that time. Soil moisture conditions in northwestern Wisconsin are still dropping, although they aren’t as low yet as they were during the late 1980s, Kafura said.

There may not be anything the county can do about the drought and low water “short of seeding clouds,” said County Clerk Kris Mayberry.

By March 15, Lenz is required to complete computer modeling to determine the impact of various hydraulic controls that may impact Round Lake water elevations, using the models developed in conjunction with the current Regional Flood Elevation and Billy Boy Dam failure analysis.

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Depending on the results, additional study could be required to determine how the manipulation of various controls would impact lake levels, including dredging and dam operations.

The task force plans to finish a draft Round Lake Management Plan in the next few months and then hold a public information meeting before finalizing the plan. The plan would go to the county board for approval and the county would apply to the DNR for any new water control permits.

The Round Lake Task Force's next meeting will be on March 22 or March 29.

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