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County working to identify Round Lake dam culprit

by **Will LaBreche, Staff Writer/Web Editor**

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Calling the incident a criminal act, the Sawyer County Land and Water Committee last Friday discussed a recent, unauthorized modification to the Little Round Lake dam, which left some committee members shaking their heads in disbelief.

County Conservationist Dale Olson reported that someone or a group of individuals welded into place a foot-tall, 3.25-inch, v-notched steel plate across the base of the dam. Olson could not speculate when the installation took place, but said that his office discovered the illegal weir on Wednesday, June 4.

To regulate water flow, the county regularly inserts boards into the dam to retain water and removes boards to increase flow. However, the recent drought has left water levels in the Round Lake watershed drastically lower, raising concerns by some property owners. After spring rains had put water

back into the system, Olson said his department was preparing to put in boards when the illegal weir was found.

"It hadn't been in there that long because it wasn't rusty," Olson explained. "It was perfectly cut to the size of the frame. And they even had the audacity to weld it in . . . not a little wire-feed (weld), but with a truck-mounted stick welder."

Olson said Sawyer County sheriff's deputies responded

to the scene and collected evidence, including photos of the structure, before it was removed.

Frustrated by the discovery, committee member Shirley Riedmann spoke plainly that she intends to treat the act as criminal.

"Somebody had to have engineering specs to know what to do," she said. "To do something like this — it was really pre-meditated."

Committee member and City of Hayward police officer Doug Mrotek speculated the incident likely would mean misdemeanor criminal property damage charges for those responsible.

"I think the people who did it know that it's not appropriate and illegal, and they're going to do it anyhow," Olson remarked.

Subsequently, after the plate had been removed, county personnel were offloading the plate from a truck when an individual "broke his finger and tore the skin off it," according to Olson.

Riedmann, former chair of the disbanded Round Lake Task Force, spearheaded county efforts to re-engineer the watershed, which took years of planning and discussion. As a result of the task force's work, the county is currently in the midst of an application process through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and other agencies. With approved applications, the county plans to rework the watershed in an attempt to better manage its water resources.

"We're following a process, and here we have people saying, 'Screw the process I'm going to fix it,'" Riedmann said. "It was wrong and if they're caught, there will be legal implications. Probably those who may have been involved, may have also been involved on the Round Lake Task Force, on the

Web sites and everything else.”

In a follow-up interview, Riedmann further stated that “when the sheriff’s department finishes their investigation, and we know who is responsible, I plan to recommend to the county board that we prosecute.”

She reiterated that the culprits “stepped outside the process” and that the county will be “monitoring the area” around the dam.

Chief Deputy Tim Zeigle confirmed Tuesday that his office is continuing to investigate the matter.

Isham named LCO environmental director

Mic Isham of the Lac Courte Oreilles tribe has been named environmental director with LCO Conservation and is jumping right into the job on a number of tribal initiatives.

He reported to the committee Friday on LCO’s plans to create a southern access corridor from the LCO Casino to a major ATV thoroughfare in southern Sawyer County.

“The (Tribal Governing) Council wants me to develop an ATV trail from the Tuscobia to the casino,” Isham said. With a September event being planned at the LCO Casino, he hopes to have the trail completed by late summer.

Though he admitted finding it more difficult than planned, Isham said he currently is working on different routes for a north-south trail extending through LCO land to the Tuscobia Trail in Couderay. Much of the trail, he added, could utilize a network of old logging roads.

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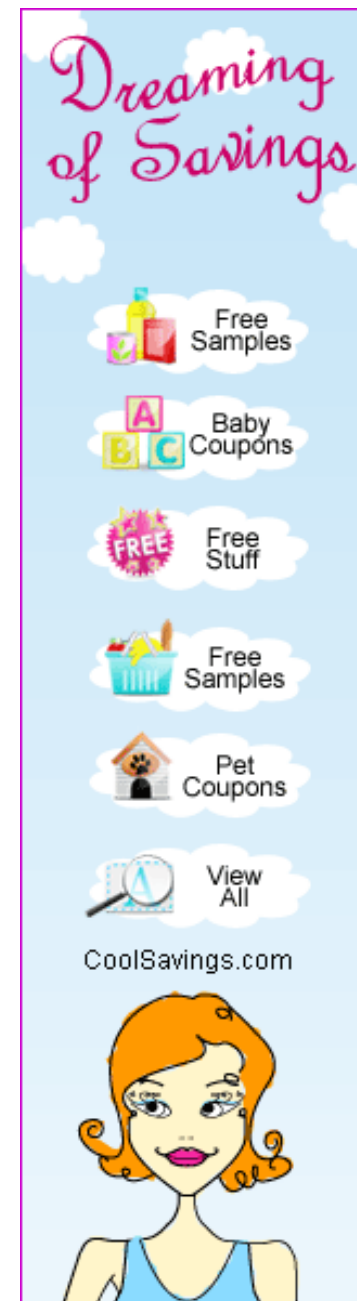
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