

Location: Pike Lake Fire Hall

Attendance: 13 Properties Represented based on Sign-In Sheet
Individuals Present: 15

Presenters:

Nicholas Berndt - Forest Service Fish Biologist

Question and Answer Period

President, Mike Ida, welcomed and thanked individuals for coming to the listening session. He answered a few brief questions regarding community concerns and then turned the presentation over to Nick Berndt.

Q1. Have you seen the wake boat article in the Lakeland Times this past Thursday? What are your thoughts?

A1. Mike Ida responded by indicating he had not seen the article and this topic was something to be discussed with the Board. More information is needed. Mike went on to share the results of the statewide DNR and Wisconsin Conservation Congress survey conducted in April 2024. Over 70% of respondents statewide were in favor of regulations relating to ballast tanks in wake boats. With regard to limiting the use of wake boats, 72% of respondents statewide were in favor of restricting the use of wake boats to lakes 1400+ acres and with a 20 feet depth or more. This information can be found online at [DNR Survey](#).

Mr. Berndt recapped the fish passage topic dating back to 2016. The passage relates to the 2015 fish management plan. In 2016 the PLCLA membership at the annual meeting voted to support the USFS looking into the possibility of building a fish passage. Mr. Berndt displayed the letter that the President of the Board at that time wrote in 2018. The USFS is still in favor of the fish passage but has put the project on hold pending the receipt of additional data. The DNR is also still in favor of the project.

Many of the questions asked were relative to the water level changes that could occur with the installation of the fish passage. Mr. Berndt referred the audience several times to Jim Mineau who is the USFS hydrologist for this area and is the best person to ask regarding water levels. You can contact him at james.mineau@USDA.gov

The annual fall year-over-year walleye surveys will continue and the Sturgeon monitoring will expand by the DNR. Sturgeon are migratory fish. A few anglers on the chain have reported seeing Sturgeon breaching on the Chain.

The USFS owns the dam structure and must follow appropriate regulations. The DNR regulates all waters in Wisconsin. These waters are held in trust by the state of Wisconsin. The DNR protects and regulates navigable waters in the state.

The fish passage is ON HOLD pending the gathering of more data. The project has been removed from SOPA (Schedule of Proposed Actions).

If approved, the fish passage would be contracted out. Mr. Berndt has been networking with the Minnesota DNR individuals responsible for the installation of the fish passages in that state. At this point the fish passages have been successful and lake associations have reported no major change in their water levels.

The Wisconsin DNR Fishery Management Plan from January 2015 provides the direction for such projects.

Q2. Must we maintain the minimum flow over the weir?

A2. State statute requires a minimum flow to protect downstream waters of at least 25% of the natural flow.

A member commented that the Chain will not produce 25% of the minimum flow as we rely on inflow from the East. We do not produce our own water within the Chain.

Q3. If the water flow went below the 25% minimum flow naturally, would we have to comply?

A3. Yes, the dam must be maintained at required levels. In a drought year it is possible the water level could be lowered by 6".

A member commented that the old weir was higher. Rocks were placed at an angle and fish would walk right over the weir. These rocks were removed when the dam was rebuilt.

Q4. How many years until the fish are trained to make the migration?

A4. Fish are reactive and will adapt quickly. The fish passage will provide a 3% slope, the fish will get through.

Water level monitoring has already begun this year to establish a more current record of water levels.

Q5. Wouldn't it be easier to again place rocks to allow the fish to move through (without 25% flow)? Talk to residents vs believing the DNR.

A5. The DNR feels that the fish passage would be more effective and efficient than just placing rocks.

Q6. Aren't fish passages installed more on rivers than on lakes?

A6. Yes, Minnesota has pioneered the installation of fish passages on their lake chains. One difference is that chains in Wisconsin are flowage chains.

Q7. What is the end goal with the fish passage?

A7. To move fish. Higher fish population and reconnecting the water body with the Chain.

Q8. What happens if the fish passage doesn't perform as planned?

A8. There is no data/research on how to fix this as installation results have been positive.

Q9. What are the effects of adding the fish passage on the spawning areas – Foulds Creek and Squaw Creek?

A9. The DNR doesn't believe it will have an effect during the Spring when spawning is taking place. The fish passage will be a net positive.

The logging dam structure must be preserved as it is on the historic register.

What the actual fish passage will look like has yet to be determined by the USFS. Once they have the required information to do so an engineering drawing of the fish passage will be presented to our Lake Association.

Q10. If you install the passage, does it need to be functional year-round (not winter)?

A10. If the DNR requires minimum flow, it will need to be functional year-round.

In Minnesota, Houston Engineering was hired to design the fish passage on the Pelican Chain of Lakes. This was a clear water chain vs tannic. These are highly engineered structures. They have been doing passages about every two years.

Q11. Would constant flow bring down the water level faster?

A11. Flows will go down naturally even without the fish passage.

One member who has a very large boat is already struggling with low water levels. Nick indicated that the USFS is not responsible for the type of boats purchased. This member prefers to place rocks before installing a fish passage.

Contacting Jim Mineau is best to discuss the potential 6" drop in water level. Some are already concerned about navigating the creeks. This drop could occur during a drought year.

Q12. What will be the lowest level of the lake?

A12. No answer could be given as water levels have not been monitored consistently over the last several years. However, we do know that the water level has dropped below the top of the weir in the recent past.

Fish would naturally move through the passage in Spring during high water.

Genetic integrity is an important connection to muskys. This connection has been severed for 50 years because of the current weir.

Walleyes are naturally producing in our Chain. The goal is not to stock. The DNR does have musky stocking numbers over the past years and is considering no longer stocking muskys in the future.

2016 was a high-water year. The lake did not go below the weir and didn't drop more than 2". In the Summer of 2017, the lake fluctuated 1.5 feet and approached the elevation of the proposed low flow channel.

Q13. Would the low flow channel have water in a drought year?

A13. The low flow channel would have no water in a drought year.

Lowering the Flambeau River depth downstream would have an effect on other stakeholders who are landowners and cabin owners on the Flambeau River.

There are lots of considerations to make – water level, fish, stakeholders, etc. that need to be looked at regarding the installation of a fish passage.

Q14. Could you do an analysis of the halfway step (placement of rocks) with limited fish movement?

A14. The DNR wants to do the project the best way they can to pass fish and in their minds the fish passage is the best way to accomplish this.

Last year the DNR ordered a minimum flow on Solberg Lake. The USFS could be ordered to mandate a minimum flow on our Chain as well.

Q15. Where is the equilibrium? All fish may not make it. To what degree or percent will the fish population increase?

A15. At this point we have been told that the redhorse and sturgeon fish population will increase in our Chain by virtue of having a fish passage.

There is not a no risk option to the fish passage. Is 10 years of data enough to warrant a fish passage?

We could do nothing while the fish languish.

The USFS is not exploring funding at this time. The chance of receiving the funding is better with the support of the Association.

The fish passage portion of the meeting ended at 11 am.

Peggy Kuss, Secretary PLCLA