

August 14 2021

Fish Committee notes

I have arranged two meetings with the DNR. The following is a summary of those meetings.

On July 16th, 2021 Joe Dion and Paul Ratzburg met with Scott Bunde of the DNR to discuss fish stocking of Buffalo Lake.

As a result of that meeting, the DNR agreed to participate in a fish stocking training at the next fish committee meeting, move a scheduled fish count from 2024 to this spring 2022. Its further recommended to hold off on any stocking until after the fish count/censes in 2022.

Paul and Joe agreed to assist the DNR with a volunteer near the dam to install a walleye fish sensor to monitor the fish migration. Bernie Sosinsky and Paul Ratzburg located a volunteer near the dam. The DNR will follow up from here. The data collected will be shared with the district.

A discussion about the gates at the dam.

In particular, gates opening from the bottom, sucking fish out of Buffalo Lake.

Scott explained, only gate number 2 has the option to allow flow over the top. Scott spoke to Lance about that being the primary gate open, but if more gates need to be opened, they will open from the bottom. There are likely some fish that are moved through the gates when they are wide open, but don't believe it is that detrimental to a Lake the size of Buffalo.

Other concerns pertaining to the gate operation arose.

Another meeting was scheduled for 08/03/2021.

In attendance were, from the DNR, Scott Bunde, David Boyarski, Lance Van Rixel, Jarrod Kehring. In attendance for the district was Joe Dion, Al Rosenthal, Bernie Sosinsky and Paul Ratzburg.

An informative discussion centered around the dam operation and the fish habitat.

The DNR staff will be considering some of the concerns raised and will get back to the district.

The dam gage in summer is 8.5 maximum and a minimum depth of 8.0.

It was unanimous to defer the fish stocking to after the fish censes in 2022.

Another factor is the availability of stocking fish. There is a shortage, and the price is double from 2016. Obtaining any fish over 8" is also unlikely.

A continuing concern was also presented to the DNR that the water level needs to be modified. Suddenly enforcing a 1976 water level procedure in 2019 without consideration, warning or a needs/damage assessment has resulted in damage to the habitat, lack of use, devaluation of property values, including, utility, desirability. Concern about removing boats in the fall was also discussed. The longer this goes on the more lack of use and damage occurs.

Paul Ratzburg

WDNR (Notes)

Montello Court House 2-4pm 08/03/2021

Montello Dam Concerns

Public Interested Parties:

Buffalo Lake District: Paul (Fish Committee); Al (Board Member), Bernie (Fish/Harvesting Committee), Joe (Chairman)

DNR Staff:

Fisheries Scott Bunde/Dave Boyarski

Park Staff Lance Van Rixel/Jarrold Kehring

Meeting Brief

1. Residents express concern about the low water levels of Buffalo Lake in regard to property value, fisheries health and recreational concerns.

Key Concerns:

1. Gate adjustments are too aggressively reactive to current conditions, which draws down the water levels to lower than 8.5. (Residents would like the levels to be as close to 8.5 as possible)

1. Staff Response: The gate adjustments are based on calculations from DNR engineers and account for upriver flow. Staff attempt to keep the gauge reading as close to 8.5 as possible without violating the court order. Examples were given on specific dates and explained that the range is 8-8.5 which DNR generally keeps it above the median range on the higher end of the spectrum.

2. Gate adjustments this year don't account for the dry season and the ability of the surrounding lands to hold water preventing normal runoff. This concern is that the dryer season has thrown off the engineer's calculations and the adjustments may be too aggressive since it's a low precipitation year.

1. Staff Response: Will check with Brent Binder to make him aware of the concern and ensure he takes it into consideration if he doesn't already.

3. Would like staff to add and communicate upstream with Oxford/Briggsville during gate adjustments and vice/versa to more accurately manipulate the gates

1. Staff Response: DNR would reach out to respective towns and request would be submitted to add them to our email list and vice/versa during any gate adjustments.

4. The Lake District would like the court order revisited. Specifically, they would like the water levels to be 8.8 and the draw down to be later in the fall and the refill to be earlier (April 1st).

1. Lake District members presented many reasons for this including habitat, navigation, property values. They also are concerned that the order is over 40 years old and current conditions are different than they were in the 1970's.

2. **Staff Response:** The Lake District already initiated the process to revisit the order. We will ask WDNR staff responsible for this process to provide information to the Lake District regarding the process of requesting a change to the order.

5. Residents would like to see a stay placed on the summer court order specifically to raise it to the water level of 8.8 right away or at least maintain the 8.5 later into the fall-. Communication was initially discussed on prior zoom call with Sen. Ballweg and then followed up with an email to Jeff Schure, but the Association hasn't received any communication back yet on what steps are needed to invoke a stay on the order.

1. **Staff Response:** DNR adheres to the court order, we do not know what is needed initiate a stay on the order, but would reach out to Jeff and potentially legal if necessary to find where the communication stopped and where it can be picked back up to give a clear and definitive answer for the residents.

6. **Emergency Stay –** Lake District representatives ask about an emergency stay in particular for this fall in case the water levels were too low to get boats and docks out. Their specific questions were about the definition of emergency and when WDNR could declare an emergency to raise the water levels.

1. **Staff Response:** We do not have that answer but will fill follow-up with appropriate DNR staff and get back to the Lake District.

Fisheries Concerns

7. **Pike/Walleye/Bass populations** are not matching what historical observations from fisherman, meaning the populations decreased per fishing reports. Specific concerns are in relation to the low water levels in Spring and if it impacts spawning activity.

i. **Staff Response:** WDNR has not heard about these concerns in recent past and the reports we have heard is that the bass and panfish fishing is pretty good. We will conduct a spring electrofishing survey in 2022 (ahead of schedule) to assess the panfish and bass populations. We will share the results with the Fish Committee and the Lake District and work on management actions if necessary.

2. **Concern** that the fish ladder isn't navigable for spawning fish in the spring during the low water range.

i. **Staff Response:** The fish ladder was designed to account for the full range of the water levels. We will be conducting a walleye acoustic telemetry project on movement throughout the Fox River system starting Fall 2021. This project, in part, will evaluation walleye passage through this fish ladder.

DNR Staff