

Lake outlet supporters monitor downstream interests

Tom Hintgen
Otter Tail County Correspondent

Supporters of an outlet plan for Little McDonald, Kerbs, Paul and Devils lakes west of Perham, pledged that the outlet will not operate if high water issues affect the downstream residents.

This pledge was voiced the morning of March 21, during an informational meeting held at the Perham Area Community Center (PACC).

"Not raising water in downstream lakes, when those areas have high water issues, will be part of the operating plan," said Lake Improvement District Board Chairman Roger Neitzke.

Downstream lakes include Little Pine, Big Pine, Rush, Buchanan, Otter Tail and other area lakes.

Otter Tail County Engineer Rick West will likely have control over the outlet, and make decisions on when it's open and when it's closed. He will work in coordination with County Land and

Resource Director Bill Kalar and the five members of the Otter Tail County Board of Commissioners.

The outlet option, subject to final approval by the Otter Tail County Board of Commissioners and various regulatory authorities, would involve moving water from the northeast side of Little McDonald Lake and into the Otter Tail River, to the north.

A water collection and sand filtration plan, to ensure that no invasive species enter the outlet piping system, is part of the project, which is estimated to cost \$10.8 million.

Little McDonald, Paul and Kerbs lakes are listed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as being infested with zebra mussels. The downstream Otter Tail River lakes are not.

"You cannot transfer water from infested waters without a filtration and/or treatment system," said Neitzke. "That plan must be approved and permitted by the Minnesota DNR (Department of

Natural Resources)."

The project is currently in a holding stage, with an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) 30-day public comment period running to April 16.

Funding, according to project proponents, would hopefully be included in a state legislative bonding bill.

The pipe system, as part of the outlet plan, would start from the northeast corner of Little McDonald Lake. The exact size of the pipe has yet to be determined. The size would be a minimum of 30 inches and maximum of 36 inches.

Two separate collection systems would share one common transfer pipe. The collection and filtration system would have no connection to surface water. This plan currently is under review by the DNR and University of Minnesota invasive species experts.

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LAKEPLAN _____

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Multiple pumps will be used as part of the overall lake outlet project. The plan is for discharge of up to 25 cubic feet per second.

Lowering the water level of the affected landlocked lakes three feet would take months. In any given month, downstream residents would likely see no more than an additional inch of water in area lakes. Impacts would even be smaller in larger lakes such as Big Pine, Rush and Otter Tail lakes.

"Flows from the outlet would definitely stop when downstream areas experience flooding," said Neitzke.

Once the EAW process is completed and approval for the overall plan comes from various governmental agencies, design and bidding could begin as early as this summer. Construction in fall 2015 is a possibility, with operation beginning in late 2015 or early 2016.

The outlet could also operate during the winter months, if need be.

For more information, log on to www.lmkp-lid.com.

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