



WASHTENAW COUNTY WATER RESOURCES COMMISSIONER

FOUR MILE LAKE LAKE LEVEL PUBLIC MEETING

NAME OF DRAIN: Four Mile Lake Lake Level ENGINEER: _____
DATE/TIME: August 15th, 2018 7pm LOCATION: Dexter Township Hall

Washtenaw County Deputy Water Resources Commissioner Scott Miller welcomed and thanked everyone for coming out to the public meeting regarding the Four Mile Lake Level.

Miller mentioned that there had been no legal action taken regard Four Mile Lake Lake Level to date.

Miller went on to introduce Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner Evan Pratt, along with thank the representatives from Dexter and Lima Townships, as well as representatives from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for being there.

Miller gave the history of Four Mile Lake Lake Level. In 1981, property owners petitioned to establish a lake level on Four Mile Lake. In 1984, a year round lake level was established and the Drain Commissioner became the enforcing agent. There was an appeal that put the project on hold until 1986. A lake level structure was built in 1990 on the south side of the lake to maintain the lake level. From 1990 to present time, the structure had to be repaired back to proper use. There were also multiple breaches in the lakes berm primarily in on the south west side of the lake that had happened, back in 1996, then again in 2003 and then in 2008 that the WCWRC has repaired. The most recent breach in 2018 that has been found is on DNR property. The current lake level structure is essentially sitting on dry land and we currently do not have a practical way to maintain the court ordered lake level.

Miller asked if there were any questions.

Resident asked what the current lake level is.

Miller responded that the current level varies with rain and such. The average current lake level when Miller took measurements in May was about a foot and a half to two feet lower than the mandated lake level.

Miller went on to mention what options they have started to look to. Miller mentioned there had been conversations with the DNR because they are a major land owner and the current breach is on their property where WCWRC does not have a current easement. The DNR had mentioned that they are not sure if the current set lake level meets still meets the needs of the lake as far as wildlife, habitat and recreation management. They are questioning if a year round lake level is the best way of managing that specific lake.

Miller went on to mention that WCWRC had talked with the townships as well. The townships stated they are interested in what their citizens and property owners are interested in.

Miller stated now that they have the DNR input, the township input, now WCWRC wants to hear what the property owners that live there and recreate there want to see happen.

Miller went on to mention some options that could happen in the future:

Option 1: Enforce the current lake level. Miller mentioned the ramifications of that would be having to repair the breach. He mentioned that even though he is a Professional Engineer, WCWRC would probably hire an Engineering firm to design a permanent fix that would hopefully not fail in the next 5-10 years. Also he mentioned that during the recent inspection of our lake level control structure, the outlet pipe of the structure is rusting out and would need to be repaired. Also, the pumps that aid in discharging Dexter #3 into the lake will also need to be replaced. According to the original court order, those pumps are the responsibility of the Four Mile Lake Lake Level district.

Option 2: Abandon the lake level. This would be a court process. WCWRC would ask for the townships help and support with resolutions for that process, then the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners would have to petition the court.

Option 3: Have a seasonal lake level. Miller mentioned that the DNR would support this due to the habitats of the ducks and wildlife out there as well as outdoor lake level. The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners would have to petition the courts to adjust the year round lake level and to possibly a seasonal lake level.

Miller mentioned that there are currently other lakes that have seasonal lake levels to help with ice damage. Then the levels are raised in the spring.

Audience member asked if option three was chosen would the repairs still have to happen and would it be the same cost.

Miller responded that it would be a different cost, but the repairs would still have to happen.

Miller mentioned that there is going to a cost to any option that is chosen.

Audience member asked if Miller had a rough cost estimate on the first option.

Miller responded that he is estimating the cost for repairing the berm, rehabilitate the structure and rehabilitate the pumps would be around \$250-\$300,000. And the assessment for that would be borne by the property owners, including the DNR.

Audience member asked if there was the possibility of getting a bond.

Miller responded yes, the WCWRC would borrow the money and then there would be assessment options to pay it back over time.

Audience member asked is a lot of property owned by the DNR?

DNR responded that they also get assessed.

Pratt mentioned that approximately 2/3 would be DNR and then the remaining 1/3 is broken up over the property owners and they receive anywhere from 3-9% depending on the land.

Miller mentioned that there was a letter received via mail to WCWRC and he read the letter from the property owner.

Traven Pelletier, 3205 Tanglewood Trl.- Happy to see so many people here. After hearing presentation, he believed that it would be a good exercise to look at the costs in more detail. He stated he is open to the idea of the seasonal lake level. He would be interested in knowing if the DNR has any studies to prove that the seasonal lake level would be beneficial. Thanks Miller for holding the meeting.

Aaron Wacker, 2475 N. Lima Center Rd.- Stated that he grew up on the lake, wants to be able to use the boat launch and wants the lake back to where it was. He stated he creates many memories and wants to be able to use the lake as it was indented to. He closed by saying that if the lake continues to go the way it has been then the lake will die and it will be very unfortunate.

Debra Ceo, 13702 Aberdeen – What is the townships role in this process?

Miller responded that input would be asked from the township in the form of resolution in either support or not before going to the County Board of Commissioners.

Ceo mentioned that she is concerned that there was no cost factor presented because it is not fair to property owners. She stated that giving the individuals cost factors for all options. She asked what is truly going to happen to the lake if there is no lake level.

Miller responded that he currently does not know.

Ceo asked what is the breach.

Miller responded there is a berm and there is essentially a hole in the berm that is approximately 30 feet long.

Ceo asked what would be the county's plan for maintenance on the lake if the repair is done.

Miller responded that he does not want to misspend the property owner's money at this point, and it costs money to create the estimates.

Virginia Gillette, 2847 N. Lima Center Rd. – mentioned that she owns the trailer park and a few years ago her neighbors got together to sandbag a breach. The sandbags were there for 2 days and they were cut and moved. She stated she would like to know what type of permanent repair would happen so the money does not go to waste again. She also mentioned that she believe that the DNR took fishing off the sign for Four Mile Lake and would like to know why. She stated there used to be 40-50 boats on the lake because it was the best fishing lake in the county. She stated she is unaware of why they would abandon that. She questioned why the DNR is concerned about lowering the level for the ducks because there are very few ducks there now with the low level but there used to be hundreds of ducks when the level was higher. She closed by staying that her company is almost out of business due to the low lake level.

Miller mentioned that WCWRC cannot just go on people's properties without permission, there would have to be an easement. There is currently not an easement around the entire like and there is not one where the current breach is happening.

Audience member asked what the reason for the pump failing.

Miller responded that in his opinion the pumps are running very short cycles causing aging to happen quicker. He also stated that one pump runs approximately 75% of the time and the other has a severe leak somewhere and the pumps are approximately 25-30 years old.

Robert Hoonec, 2847 Lima Center Rd. – mentioned that he has been on the lake 41 years and was part of 2008 "Save Four Mile Lake". Walked over there the same day and saw water running over the sand bags. Asked what would be the plan. He questioned if the berm was man made.

Miller responded that he understood it was artificially created.

DNR representative responded that it was created to truck out the marl.

Miller responded that he agreed that sandbags would not be a good option. He stated he is thinking a seawall or sheet piling in combination of earth and fill.

Hoonec went on to mention that the public access is also not being maintained. He wanted to widen it himself one year and was told he couldn't because it is private property.

Miller wanted to clarify that WCWRC does not have any rights to go and clear the launch or give permission to anyone to do so.

DNR representative mentioned that they also do not have the right to do that without permitting from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

James Colwell, 2897 Lima Center Rd. – stated his family has rented this property for over 100 years. Stated that the amount of shore line even since May has been growing and continues to grow every year. He mentioned that he got rid of his pontoon due to the level being so low. He stated that everyone seems so protectant about protecting the wetlands and there is so many weeds at the north end of the lake, a canoe cannot even get through.

Greg Gillette, 2847 N. Lima Center Rd. – stated his family has owned the farm since 1893, the family started a trailer park that has been running to being an income into the family. He read the following from the court order, “the statute also requires the court to set a lake level which will best preserve and protect the natural resources of the state and preserve and protect the values of the properties of such lake as a result of the normal lake level.” He mentioned that it is intended to allow farmer to drain their field and to use the lake fishing or hunting lake and allows for its proper use. Gillette mentioned that he would strongly like WCWRC to consider doing the job that the court gave in maintain the lake level and to strongly consider the value of the lake. To ignore it, he believes is totally irresponsible.

Bill Mikkelson, 3101 Lima Center Rd. – mentioned he owns the campground to the north of Gillette’s. Planned on maintaining during retirement years, but with the lake going down, people are still less likely to occupy this. He stated that even with this new structure he believes that water will still find its way through. He mentioned he is for restoring the lake properly.

William Ballagh, 2571 Lima Center Rd. – Pass.

Elizabeth Longley, 3143 Tanglewood Trl. – Mentioned her husband has been on the lake for 70 years. Questioned the DNR’s thoughts on the use of recreational activities on the lake.

DNR representative responded that they are not saying that the current level is too low, but questioning if one static level is what is best.

Longley went on to mention how dry the bog is and mentioned that a bald eagle nests there, as well as red-headed woodpecker. She went on to mention the economic development about having this lake. She questioned if there is a court case, who would pay the cost of that.

Miller responded that the district will bear the costs.

Longley went on to question if there could be non-profit organization to help look at these costs. She stated that she believes that the county should look at this as a money maker and want to restore it.

Pratt mentioned that having this meeting would hopefully help avoid having a heated court case.

Miller mentioned that Commissioner Pratt does look for alternative funding and it would be explored.

Cindy Wacker, 2475 N. Lima Center Rd. – mentioned she has been on the lake since 1975. She mentioned she used to be afraid of the water snakes that were there, but there are no longer snakes. She mentioned she is able to walk and see the bald eagle nest. She mentioned there needs to be a plan in place for people that come in and destroy the repairs. She stated that she can speak for her family that they want the lake level restored and it is sad that it has got to this point. She

mentioned as a landowner she is frustrated that the government did not do their job and it got to this point of having a meeting to see how to fix the issue. Wacker went on to say that they tried to put a boat in about a month ago and was unsuccessful. She wishes everyone would appreciate the lake because it is unfair that everyone that used to fish on that lake no longer can. She also mentioned that she was frustrated that the DNR has not been out there in years to assess the issues.

Amanda Colwell, 9000 Bishop Lake Rd, - mentioned that her family owns a cottage and she grew up on that lake. She mentioned that it is sad how the lake is deteriorating. She attempted to take a little boat out and got stuck when that used to never be an issue. She stated she is in favor of saving the lake level.

Luke Hollis, 1100 S. Lima Center Rd. – mentioned that his grandpa owned property out there and he also grew up on the lake and he is in favor saving the lake level and believes that the lake should be fixed.

Joseph Kaniski, 1170 McMillan Rd, - mentioned that he has noticed since the lake level has gone down causing the traffic to come down that the Chelsea State Park property is being used for drug trafficking more. He stated that he strongly believes that something needs to be done before it is too late. Kaniski stated that he appreciates the DNR being there and throwing out options.

DNR representative mentioned that they are not against having a lake level, they would prefer a seasonal lake level because it is harder to get partners to help pay for the cost when there is a static level. They mentioned that static levels are not ideal for them when it comes to management of ecosystems. She went on to say that they are trying to work together to come up with the best option for everyone.

Dale Lesser, 12695 Island Lake Rd.- he asked who petitioned the BOC initially.

Miller responded that the petition came from property owners back then. Lesser mentioned that he resides on Dexter #3 and if the lake is brought back up then the pumps need to be restored. He mentioned that the Drain Commissioner back then, Mr. Murray said that putting in a lift station or a pump station would help the famers relieve some water off of Dexter #3. He mentioned that he went out and looked at the lake and took a laser out on the lake to see what numbers he could find. Lesser went on to say that if the Lake Level does come up that the pump station for Dexter #3 stays and needs to be in working order. He asked if the DNR is agreeable to fixing the berm.

DNR representative responded, yes they are looking for a robust repair to help all parties as well as how the costs are assessed.

Lesser mentioned that there needs to be a better lake level structure to control the lake level.

Terry McFadden from the DNR mentioned that there is data to support why a seasonal lake level is more beneficial for wildlife then a static level. He went on to mention that they are looking for a compromise to help get partners of the DNR to help pay for some of the costs.

Craig Meyer, Lima Township Supervisor, thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting. He said he believes that it is clear what direction the township should take after hearing what the people want. He mentioned that the township would be in contact with WCWRC. He concluded by saying if anyone had any questions, please come talk to him.

Conversation ensued with the DNR with various residents about various topics.

Water Resources Commissioner Evan Pratt mentioned that he did not want to spend money on studies before meeting with the people of the assessment district because he wanted to be sure that he was doing what they wanted him to. He stated that he did not want to spend their money if they were not interested in keeping the lake level. He closed by saying it was clear to him tonight that the lake level needs to remain, and will be looking to whether a static or seasonal lake level will be what is best for that specific area.

Deputy Water Resources Commissioner Scott Miller thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He mentioned that the follow up steps from this point would be to start looking more into options and he believed that there will be another meeting in the future to talk more in detail about the route that is chosen.