

Summary of Public Comments and Questions
Phillips Chain Proposed Drawdown
Open House meeting
April 9, 2008 (6:00-9:00 PM)
Price County Courthouse

All comments and questions received from the public at the open house session were recorded on a flipchart. 43 comments or questions were received from a crowd of about 25-30 people. A power point presentation was given by Blake Pluemer, Phillips Chain O'Lakes Association President which lasted about 30 minutes. We then opened the floor for public comment or questions regarding the drawdown proposal. I grouped the comments/questions by number into specific categories. I also provided answers to the questions within this document.

Private and Municipal Drinking Water Wells

#1 Municipal Wells-There are 3 municipal wells serving the City of Phillips. They are relatively shallow (40-50 ft) There is a concern that a 5 foot drawdown will create production problems. In 1996 the 4 foot drawdown caused cavitation (pulling in air) problems. The City has about 350,000 gallons of water in tower storage, but that could go quickly if there would be a major structure fire. The city may be limited (during drawdown) in obtaining the water they would need in these emergency situations. *The DNR will investigate this issue further.*

#7 How does the water table react around a flowage? *The flowage creates a mounding of the water table causing the groundwater elevations to be higher then they would be if there was no flowage (old river channel). As flowage levels drop, groundwater levels also decrease. This is more pronounced in areas with steeper slopes.*

#9 Is my non-conforming well illegal? *Yes it is illegal and when replaced must be code compliant.*

#35 Why were there no well impacts during the Soo Lake (Lac Sault Dore) drawdown? *A wide variety of factors could play a role here. The number of wells (fewer), the depth, steepness of the topography, the depth of drawdown and the duration.*

Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) Outfall

#2 Will the outfall pipe at the WWTP be left high and dry with a 5 foot drawdown? The outfall pipe needs to remain in the water for mixing zone purposes. *I talked with Lon Franson, Wastewater Engineer and it was his opinion that a 5 foot drawdown would most likely expose the outfall pipe. But the outfall pipe could be extended.*

The Issue of Trust

#4/#18 How come we did not know about this drawdown proposal? *That is the purpose of this open house meeting. Information does not always get to everyone. In fairness to the Lake Association, their meetings have been announced and are open to the public. The drawdown proposal was also highlighted in a story in the Phillips Bee. The lake association has chosen to stay away from mass mailings because of the cost, but this is something that will be considered in the future.*

#21 Is dam repair a major reason to support a drawdown? *No it is not, but it is convient. Repairs to the dam could be done other ways, like using a coffer dam, but it is more expensive. Also, dam repairs would also require less of a drawdown and a shorter duration.*

#26 The Chain is unique. You have nothing to compare it to, to predict changes. The risk is too much. You can't prove it will work. *We have studies that show drawdown is an effective tool to control EWM over the short term. It is not a permanent fix and may need to be done every 3-5 years.*

#29 Who makes the decision to go ahead with a drawdown? *The decision rests with the Price County Board.*

#31 The lake association needs to do a better job explaining to the public why we do not want EWM in our lakes. *This is a good point. The negative aspects of EWM were covered in the power point presentation. EWM can out compete native plants, reduce biodiversity, they can reach nuisance conditions (impact recreational activities) and provide poor habitat.*

#37 There is concern that the lake association and DNR are not accountable for their actions. *The risks and benefits of a drawdown were presented. We may not be able to predict all outcomes and there are some risks, but we can take steps to minimize those risks (i.e. aeration to minimize the chance of a fish kill).*

Public Resource (All citizens should have a voice)

#3 The resource belongs to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin. Need to hear comments from all citizens not just the lake property owners or association members. *We do not disagree. That is the reason for this public meeting.*

#5 What is the total lake association membership? *40 + members.*

#12 What is the economic loss caused by a drawdown (Impact on tourism/fishing)? *This was not evaluated.*

#20 You have the cart before the horse. You need to gather more public input before you decide that a drawdown is feasible. This should not be a done deal. *That is the purpose of this open house. The drawdown is not a done deal.*

What is the extent of the Eurasian Water Milfoil Problem?

#6 How many acres of EWM are in the chain? *Duroy has ~ 60 acres, Wilson ~ 229 acres Elk has a few plants because the habitat is not there (mostly gravel and sand substrate) and Long Lake is known to have at least a few acres of EWM, but a full survey has not been made.*

#8 What will the EWM be like next summer (will it decrease on its own)? *EWM coverage could change from year to year. It has increased and spread since it was introduced. It usually does not decrease substantially on its own without some sort of management.*

#11 There is a concern that EWM will not get any worse. *Densities of EWM have increased since it was introduced in 2000. EWM will grow to a depth of 8.5 feet in Wilson Lake and 5.0 feet in the rest of the chain. It is possible that it could spread into suitable locations (silty substrate) where it is not growing now. The only way to know for sure is to conduct annual plant surveys (which are proposed).*

#39 The weeds have always been bad or even worse years ago (leave it alone). *We are not disputing that aquatic plant densities may have been high in the past. It is a fertile system. The difference now is that EWM is replacing the native aquatic vegetation at nuisance levels.*

#40 What's the difference if we have native plants or EWM (plants are plants)? *EWM beds produce a monoculture (only one plant variety, like a corn field). EWM replaces the more desirable aquatic plants that provide more diversity, more food sources and more habitat types for fish and wildlife.*

Soo Lake Drawdown

#10 A 4 foot drawdown occurred on Soo Lake. It was taken down to the main river channel. There were reports of stranded fish. The drawdown had a major impact on the fishery. It took 8 years for the fishery to recover. Now the weeds are back. *This is public opinion. We have not gone back to review the fishery file. The point is that there are risks and benefits to using drawdown as a tool. Also, drawdown to control aquatic vegetation is a short term fix and needs to be repeated if it is proven to be effective.*

Other alternatives to a drawdown need to be investigated

12 Focus the management efforts on Wilson Lake only with chemical treatment or dredging. *Both are alternatives that could be considered.*

#24 Use chemical treatment on all lakes (*Treatment costs average about \$500 per acre*).

#25/#38 There should be a do nothing alternative and monitor.

#30/#41 Consider just monitoring the control by weevils. Mechanically harvest the EWM.

Fertility of the lakes in the chain

#13 These lakes are fertile and we will always have a plant problem. It is more important to project the multiple uses. *That is what we are trying to do by addressing the EWM problem.*

#19 How many tributaries enter Wilson Lake (there are 3)? These rivers are contributing sediment to the lake. This will create more habitats for plants and EWM. We need to do something about the nutrients. *Sources of nutrients can be addressed through a lake management plan.*

#42 Lawn fertilizer usages add up to more weeds in the lakes. Natural shoreline need to be restored.

Impacts of the drawdown on the fishery

#14 What are the fish kill possibilities as a result of a drawdown? *That possibility exists even without a drawdown. Two aeration systems are proposed to reduce the chances of winterkill during the drawdown. The targeted 5 foot drawdown would also limit the volume of water that is oxygenated by the river arm and the aeration system. A complete fish kill is not likely.*

#15 How will the drawdown impact fish spawning? *The drawdown may reduce northern pike spawning if the chain is not filled by that time. The intent is to begin refilling the chain in early April. In any event, it would only impact one year class.* Other early spawning species could also be affected - walleyes, musky, and perch.

#16 What is the impact on young of the year fish? The drawdown will eliminate the food source. *This should not be a major problem. Young fish feed on plankton (suspended in water column). Plankton rebounds quickly as the chain is being filled.*

#22 Drawdown will cause increased predation. *This is probably true.*

27/#36 Drawdown will result in concentration of fish and overexploitation. Special regulations need to be adopted to protect the fishery. *The need for special regulations will be considered, but not likely. The lake association could promote voluntary compliance with reduced bag limits during the drawdown.*

Impacts of drawdown on aquatic plants (including EWM)

#17/#43 Will a drawdown kill all aquatic plants? *EWM is most susceptible to a winter freeze out. Native plants are not as susceptible, and will respond much quicker and hopefully fill in the areas where EWM was growing.*

#23/#34 What are the changes in the plant community as a result of a drawdown? *That is what we will be studying during our plant surveys. We expect a reduction in EWM and increased growth response of native plants. We hope to improve native plant diversity and habitat for fish and wildlife.*

#28 Does the drawdown have to be 5 feet? *To be effective and control a large percentage of the EWM, yes it does. Also a 5 foot drawdown reduces the volume of water that needs to be oxygenated.*

#33 What was the reason for the 1996 drawdown? *The intent was to control over abundant native plants. The drawdown was short term (two weeks) do to the well issue (shallow wells drying up).*