

Legislature addresses lake level

Laws passed during the 2015 Minnesota legislative session include several provisions that address the decreasing water levels of White Bear Lake.

Finding long-term, regional solutions to improve the water level in White Bear and promote water conservation were major priorities for legislators in the Northeast Metro area.

Our community should know that there was some progress made on water level issues in the state legislature this year. I am pleased that we were able to secure gains in three areas: a conservation program, a feasibility study, and a technical advisory committee. Working together, these programs will further develop our plan to defend this valuable community asset.

The Legislature allocated \$150,000 for the Race 2 Reduce conservation program in order to promote sustainable water usage habits in our community. Local schools have already taken advantage of this program, and expanding its reach will build a more water-friendly state on a grassroots level.

In addition to Race 2 Reduce, \$100,000 was allocated to develop cost estimates and a feasibility study for the augmentation of White Bear Lake with water from

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the Sucker Lake chain of lakes. This process will allow the state to find the most efficient and effective way to address possible solutions for the future.

A third encouraging step this legislative session was the creation of a technical advisory committee, charged with providing the scientific and engineering expertise necessary to providing the region an adequate and sustainable water supply. Based out of the Metropolitan Council's Water Committee, the committee will allow White Bear Lake and surrounding communities to build a long-term plan for our area's water resources.

Rep. Peter Fischer and I have been active on the new Legislative Water Commission. He noted that the Minnesota DNR is expected to have developed new protocol and a recommended

protected elevation for the commissioner's review in May 2016, and the US Geological Survey will be releasing a report on the project in November of 2016. During that same month, the DNR expects to release a five-step process to establish a protected elevation.

White Bear's water level fell from its usual level of 923.21 feet above sea level to a historic low of 919 feet in January 2012. It has fluctuated since then due to rainfall. Visit the Minnesota DNR's website to find an up-to-date water level report on White Bear Lake.

Groups that mainly represent homeowners sued the Department of Natural Resources in 2012 with the plaintiffs claiming that by allowing 13 local communities to use groundwater for their public water supply, the DNR has permitted too much groundwater use in the area, thus lowering White Bear Lake. The plaintiffs asked the judge to set a lake water elevation, reduce local communities' groundwater use and require the agency to augment the lake with additional water.

The parties reached a settlement of the lawsuit last December. A key aspect of the settlement is that it halts litigation up to three years. During this time, the DNR

and local communities have agreed to support efforts to develop a surface water supply. The DNR also agreed to set a protective elevation for White Bear Lake. Finally, all parties to the settlement agreed to pursue conservation measures.

The involvement of the White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce, area property owners, students and civic leaders has been vital to the progress made on the White Bear Lake issues. I am grateful to all the groups for their continued advocacy.

Timeline:

February 2016 – DNR submits a report to the Legislature with lake augmentation cost estimates.

November 2016 – DNR establishes a protected elevation of White Bear Lake.

November 2016 – United States Geological Survey releases report on how groundwater and surface water interaction affect White Bear Lake.

February 2017 – The Metropolitan Council submits a report to the Legislature on White Bear Lake's water level issues as part of the "Minnesota Water Plan."

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