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The lake has some new friends

by Debra Neutkens
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WHITE BEAR LAKE — A newly minted group has stepped forward to address lake level woes.

Called the Friends of White Bear Lake, the seven-member nonprofit corporation has one mission: To "save the lake" through augmentation.

Its chairman is Harry Melander, a Mahtomedi resident who also happens to represent District 12 on the Metropolitan Council. District 12 includes all of Washington County except Hugo, Landfall and Oakdale.

His role on the Friends board of directors is strictly a result of his interest as a resident, Melander said. "We are a group of people who have a passion

and love for the lake; what it has provided for the region for generations past and future," stated the new chairman. "We hope to create awareness and advocacy for the challenge that the lake is facing. We believe the interim solution is augmentation."

The seven members include some of the same people involved in the lake level lawsuit: Greg McNeely, chairman of the White Bear Lake Restoration Association, plaintiff in the suit against the DNR, and Jim Markoe, president of the White Bear Lake Homeowners Association, an intervenor in the litigation. The remaining four members include Matt Kramer, president of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Tom Snell, White Bear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce executive director, Beau Montgomery, a White Bear

resident, and Sue Keswani of Mahtomedi.

One of their first formal actions is to hire James Clark, the lobbyist used by the White Bear Lake Restoration Association last session to be its "eyes and ears" at the Capitol. The Friends group will be working to enlist political support for augmentation, with help from the Legislature via the bonding bill next session.

Melander, who was first appointed to the Met Council in 2011 by Gov. Mark Dayton and reappointed in 2015, hopes to get support from Minnesota's chief executive as well.

Several members of the group met with the governor and his staff Sept. 11 to "share personal experience and concerns about the lake," Melander said. "We came away from that meeting,

I'm not going to say optimistic, but we had a good feeling in our gut."

Markoe added that the meeting in the governor's mansion was "very cordial."

"The governor was gracious with his time," he said. "We had a great conversation that we look forward to continuing."

Friends of White Bear Lake is also working with Short Elliott Hendrickson, the Vadnais Heights engineering firm that did the augmentation feasibility study for the Met Council. SEH engineers also did the permitted augmentation systems for Snail Lake in Shoreview and Gilfillan in North Oaks.

"We have a plan," Markoe said, "but nothing is finalized for publication. As far as cost, it's

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dramatically lower than Met Council estimates."

Independent work by the restoration association reported last fall put a price tag of \$5 to \$10 million, with filtration, to supplement the lake. Its plan was to run a pipeline 2.5 miles from Vadnais Lake (which gets water from the Mississippi River) to White Bear Lake.

Markoe said the group's motiva-

tion is this: "To restore high-quality public access to the lake and preserve a regional asset. The ultimate example is the beach (Ramsey County), which was closed for the seventh year. Even with two wet summers, we're 2 to 2.5 feet away from the beach reopening. We need augmentation to get that beach open and provide access to the lake."