

White Bear Lake Conservation District agrees to leadership role on lake level

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WHITE BEAR LAKE — Local legislators are getting the help they requested to move toward a lake level solution.

At a special meeting April 1 with the White Bear Lake Conservation District (WBLCD), Sen. Roger Chamberlain, Rep. Peter Fischer and Rep. Linda Runbeck pitched the idea to the board of becoming a "fiscal agent" on behalf of the lake.

"We thought it wise to involve the WBLCD in a levy process," Chamberlain told the board members. "We need a way to raise money to pay for some of the lake level solutions and it seemed logical to use the conservation district. You already represent the five communities around the lake."

Runbeck called White Bear Lake the "epicenter" to what is happening in regard to water management in the metro area. "What happens here will be precedent setting," she said.

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— Rep. Peter Fischer

It's too early to know just what role the WBLCD will play, but Runbeck said she sees the district lobbying area communities to form a joint powers board to administer a levy or the state bonding money to build a water treatment plant to augment the lake.

"There hasn't been an entity to take care of things," Fischer noted. "People are talking solutions to the lake problem but there is no vehicle to help run it. Does one community take the lead, does this organization take the lead or do we have a joint powers board to help facilitate communities coming together? We're missing the part of who will take it by the horns and make sure these things happen."

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resentative, Gene Altstatt, said he would support taking on a role as fiscal agent.

Dellwood representative Pat McCann called it "a leap of faith."

"We don't know what is going to happen but someone has to lead this," McCann said. "In my opinion, it's complete malaise. No one is in charge of anything."

That sentiment is exactly what the legislators want to change. "We are trying to get someone to take charge; to provide guidance to what will happen first," iterated Fischer.

Chamberlain feels the state will offer financial support if there is local leadership. "We know there are a lot of unknowns. We are here to build relationships. But

you are right, there is malaise. I think all the (surrounding) cities know the importance of this."

Altstatt made a motion to take on the responsibility of fiscal agent with the additional responsibility of helping form a joint powers board with the five communities "and any others that might express interest" to work toward solving the lake issue. The motion passed 7-0. Three members were absent from the meeting at White Bear Lake City Hall: Jane Harper, Diane Longville and Mark Genz.

Conservation district attorney Alan Kantrud said he wasn't sure the WBLCD had authority to create a joint powers board. "Would you entertain amendments to organizing

legislation to allow these activities?" he asked the legislators. "Yes," Fischer replied, "if you need it. Give us the guidance and we'll make it happen."

Fischer said it makes sense for the district to facilitate lake level solutions approved by the Legislature. "You're the entity that crosses boundaries. No one else in the region covers that common area."

Runbeck reminded the group the DNR wants to implement its groundwater management plan in May without considering any other solutions.

"They're putting policy ahead of the science," Chamberlain maintained. "The groundwater management plans are almost arbitrary. Cities that use the aquifer are asked to change while Minneapolis is left to drill big, fat wells."

"Anything we do has to be paid for," added the senator. "Augmentation is one solution that will be debated later. There is not a lot of desire to use state money to augment lakes in

any area."

When asked if there was a deadline to forming a joint powers board, Runbeck said January is a good target. "Next year is a bonding year at the Legislature," she noted. "We could all be ready to introduce a bill to augment, or whatever, then."

"We're here to help push things along," Fischer told the members. "If not, the malaise will continue. We want you to know your delegation is ready and set, we just need a push to help it go."

Chamberlain said the area legislators are committed to finding a solution to the lake problem. "We have to stop talking and start doing. I think people will be on board with that. But someone has to pay for it. The WBLCD needs to take a leadership role and others will follow. If we don't do something at the local level, the DNR and Met Council will and it will be stuff we won't like. If we take the lead, we will short circuit all that nonsense."