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SHAWANO AREA WATERWAYS MANAGEMENT

A report to the community by SAWM and NEW Media



Anglers and boaters set off for their latest watery adventure on Shawano Lake. This special reports on the activities of Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM), a volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing the resources for the benefit of the residents on Shawano Lake, The Channel, and the Wolf River pond above the Shawano Paper Mill Dam. One of its key priorities is resolution of the ongoing controversy over water levels as regulated at the Shawano Paper Mill Dam. SAWM completed its new Lake Management Plan this year. A Lake Management Plan is a comprehensive document that includes water quality sampling and evaluation, shoreline condition assessments, an update to the watershed assessment, fishery and fishery habitat assessment, analysis of the lake bottom core sediment, and aquatic plant surveys.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

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SAWM supports permanent water level reslution

Application anticipated by August 15

A final resolution to a seven-year long controversy over area water levels may be in sight for Shawano Lake, The Channel and the Wolf River pond above the Shawano Paper Mill Dam.

Eagle Creek Renewable Energy through NEW Hydro, its dam operator, plans to file a draft application with the Federal Energy Resources Commission for a permanent water level of 802.9 above mean sea level (msl) by Aug. 15, according to a May 27 email shared by Shawano Area Waterways Management.

SAWM has been a primary player in the debate over a water level most beneficial to boaters, fish and wildlife, shoreland resident and other groups.

FERC regulates water levels in navigable waters in the U.S. through dam operations permits.

Bill Monfre, SAWM board vice president, noted the group has other priorities and other expenses but

is holding off and concentrating on getting this amendment through. "It's our number one priority," he said. The situation will be discussed at the June 4 SAWM annual meeting.

SAWM believes the historic target elevation 802.9 is appropriate to ensure safe navigation on the lake, channel and river. The effort also has the support of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and several local fishing groups. The agreement is contingent on ECRE reaching a cost-sharing agreement with SAWM.

In its last order, FERC directed ECRE to develop an operations plan within 90 days in consultation with the DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "that details the actions and processes that will be used to ensure compliance while temporarily operating the project at the higher normal target impoundment elevation."

FERC requires the application for a permanent amendment be filed no later than Dec. 31.

Meanwhile, waters are at 802.9 feet msl Shawano Lake, The Channel and the Wolf River pond above

the Shawano Paper Mill Dam under a FERC two-year amendment granted in July 2021.

The current water level authorization expires on Nov. 15, 2023. Records indicate this level was maintained at least from 2000 to 2015 with no significant environment effects.

The application process includes a 30-day public comment period. In previous applications, individuals living downstream expressed concern for flooding. However, FERC's 2021 order said flooding can be prevented by limiting the drawdown rate so it does not significantly increase downstream flows.

The water level issue surfaced when a Shawano filed a complaint over ice damage and water levels in 2015. The level was drawn down to 802.5 above msl that year, triggering concerns over shallow water posing a danger to boaters and concerns over spawning of game fish including walleye and sturgeon.

SAWM, NEW Hydro and its consultant, Gomez and Sullivan, have been finalizing the filing. The consultant and NEW Hydro have completed

a desktop hydrologic study.

The hydrologic study compared the flooding potential if a 1% Annual Exceedance Probability event occurred at the normal pool height of 802.5 vs the proposed value of 802.9. The results displayed no meaningful difference in results.

The DNR has indicated it has no concerns with the proposed target level of 802.9 feet msl. Monfre said the group is still waiting for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to weigh in but he noted the federal group usually defers to the state agency.

SAWM representatives will continue to consult with officials in the surrounding city, county and villages and towns to educate elected officials on the project's status. The government groups will be asked to formally support the permanent amendment in writing and demonstrate there is widespread support for the solution, Monfre said.

SAWM representatives will also seek the same support from local fishing organizations, who have expressed concern over seasonal water level changes in the past.

Worth it

New Airport Road bridge will be worth the wait, advocates say

It'll be inconvenient for this summer and fall but boaters and drivers can anticipate a new bridge on County Road HHH (Airport Road) over what residents call "The Channel" and what planners call Shawano Creek.

Construction of the bridge, north of the East Green Bay Street/Airport Road intersection on Shawano's east side, is expected to start July 25 and will continue until Nov.11, Grant Bystol, Shawano County highway commissioner, said.

to, Shawano County highway commissioner, said.

Bystol said the July start date was selected to allow lake visitors and residents easier access to the lake for the early summer months, including the economically important July 4 holiday. Unfortunately, he said, the project had to be started in mid-summer so it could be completed before winter weather shuts it down.

The narrow land area does not allow a temporary or one-lane bridge to be installed during construction.

"It's all got to go out and all got to go in," Bystol said of the new structure.

He acknowledged that the detour will be an inconvenience for many, but the long-term benefits will be worth it, he said.

"When you think about the impact of tourism and the use that it gets, we

need to replace it the right way," Bystol said. "The community will be very happy with it."

Boaters can anticipate The Channel to be closed during the week but will be open from 1 p.m. on Fridays to 6 a.m. on Mondays, Bystol said. There may be some intermittent openings of the waterway on other week days but that is very difficult to predict, he added.

Drivers will be detoured on East Green Bay Street to State Highway 47 through Shawano, Bystol said. Temporary traffic signals will be set up at the intersection of County Road H and State Highway 47 north of the city to facilitate traffic movement.

The total cost is \$1.8 million with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation shouldering 80% of the costs and the local community picking up the remaining 20%, he said.

The original proposal from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation in October 2019 called for replacing the bridge with a version the same size and width. The Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) and other boating and fishing interests opposed the idea.

Their input helped shape the decision to replace the bridge with one that is higher by 2.2 feet. Current clearance puts it at 5.1 feet above the base of the bridge, though that varies somewhat due to changes in water levels, Bystol said.

The new design will have roughly the same appearance as the bridge over The Channel on North Main Street in Shawano, Bystol said.

The new bridge will also have wider shoulders that accommodate snowmobilers, hikers and bicyclists.



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SAWM defers replacing weed cutting gear

Water level project prompts SAWM to assess priorities

Shawano Area Waterways Management is looking for ways to cut weeds—and costs.

Although the SAWM fleet of two weed harvesters and barges needs replacing, that expense is being put off while the local organization seeks resolution of the water levels controversy for Shawano Lake, The Channel and the Wolf River Pond above the Shawano Paper Mill Dam, Bill Monfre, SAWM board vice president, said.

SAWM maintains two weed cutting units because the current County

Road HHH bridge is too low for units to cover the entire water way. With the replacement of that bridge in 2022 (see related story), the local organization will need only one unit. Six to eight people are hired each year to run the equipment.

The anticipated expense is about \$250,000 for the harvester and \$250,000 for a barge, Monfre added.

Monfre said the existing equipment is at least 15 years old. SAWM has reached the limit on maintaining and updating the equipment. Some ingenuity has been employed, including relying on a local resident who located a used diesel engine for a needed repair. Those limitations resulted in failure of SAWM to do some weed cutting for private landowners, requiring refunds of the fees paid, Monfre said.

Monfre added the current equipment does not have Global Positioning System capabilities, requiring operators to rely on their phones. Accurate location is essential as SAWM permits are very specific on location and types of plants that can be cut.

When the group is ready to replace the weed harvesters, Monfre said SAWM will explore a variety of funding options, including asking for support from local municipalities for purchase of new equipment.

Other Weed Control Measures

SAWM chemically treats weeds in designated areas of the lake mainly along seven buoy lanes. SAWM member Bart DeFere volunteers his time and money to gaining and maintaining the certifications necessary to handle

this spraying on behalf of SAWM. The spraying costs would be substantially higher if it had to hire a contractor.

While SAWM crews cutting weeds in public areas will continue this year, SAWM members can pay for cutting around docks on the lake and The Channel. The cost for private cuttings this year is \$200 per cutting if requested and paid for by June 1. After June 1, the cost increases to \$300 per cutting.

The invasive Eurasian water milfoil also merits control applications.

The crew also skims floating weed beds from the lake to reduce the amount of weeds that would otherwise gather on shore or interfere with boat navigation. This also removes an additional source of nutrients that would promote additional undesirable plant growth.

Gary DeFere remembered as tireless advocate for area waters

Former SAWM president passed away September 2021

Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) members will miss Gary DeFere.

The former association president, 83, passed away Sept. 15, 2021. He had served on SAWM's board since 1998.

DeFere played a visible role in the Shawano community as he and his family were original members of the Shawano Ski Sharks water ski club. He was the show's announcer for many years.

SAWM vice president Todd Dobberstein developed a close relationship with DeFere from their positions on the SAWM board.

"We served on the SAWM board for 20 or more years together," said Dobberstein. "We always ran the meetings together."

"He was very passionate about the waterways," said Dobberstein. "He even has Shawano Lake engraved on his urn."

Bart DeFere said of his father, "His undeniable passion for Shawano Lake, the water quality, the weed control issue and the overall clarity of the lake were some of his highest priorities while he was president. The dedication to the lake was evident by the countless hours he spent on the computer, coordinating meetings both during the summer as well as the off-season winters."

The younger DeFere, also active in SAWM, continued, "He attended meetings to better understand the issues that were before him as presi-

dent. He worked closely with the DNR and other federal agencies to try to resolve some of the ongoing issues that still plague the lake to this day."

"Gary truly enjoyed being part of the Shawano community. He loved living on the lake as it provided he and his family with countless hours of fun and enjoyment," Bart DeFere said.

Dobberstein said that DeFere became so involved with the waterways, he would go out with his son and clear the waterways for buoy placement, as well as spray weeds himself.

He added that DeFere did whatever he could to help those who had questions about the waterways.

"He directed all of the calls to his home phone, where he would take the calls himself," said Dobberstein. "He would answer everyone's questions and try to help everyone out."

Dobberstein said that he would also

talk to the DNR about applying for grants and permits.

According to Dobberstein, the effect that DeFere had on the waterways couldn't be overstated.

"The waterways mean so much to the community," said Dobberstein. "The waterways are a reason for tourism and recreation."

Dobberstein called DeFere a friend and a mentor.

"He was a true volunteer who cared for this community," said Dobberstein. "He went over and above to help."

Dobberstein said that he will remember DeFere for not only his commitment to the community, but also his attitude.

"Gary focused on the positives in life," said Dobberstein. "He was always smiling and shaking hands with someone. He never had a bad thing to say."

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SAWM creates new committees under lake management plan update

Committees address water quality, fish, wildlife, recruiting tasks

Shawano Area Waterways Management, a volunteer, nonprofit organization that exists for the benefit of the residents on Shawano Lake, the channel, and the Wolf River completed its new Lake Management Plan this year.

A Lake Management Plan is a comprehensive document that includes water quality sampling and evaluation, shoreline condition assessments, an update to the watershed assessment, fishery and fishery habitat assessment, analysis of the lake bottom core sedi-

ment, and aquatic plant surveys.

To remain eligible for state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) grants, SAWM is required to update its Lake Management Plan every five years and began this revision in 2019. The project cost almost \$53,000. However, a DNR grant of almost \$40,000 helped to cover the cost.

The SAWM board of directors has approved the Lake Management Plan and a copy is posted on the SAWM website, sawm.org.

One action item from the new plan was to create standing committees. The standing committees will organize and delegate all the initiatives within the plan. They are Education and Communication, Lake Quality, Safety and Navigation, Fisheries and Wildlife.

Two of the new committees are:

Lake Quality Committee

The Lake Quality Committee aims to sustain healthy and safe Shawano Area Waterways through efforts to enhance, maintain and improve shoreland and aquatic habitat, water quality, safety and navigability. Additional efforts are focused on project and equipment funding, cost analysis, risk assessment, lake treatment strategies and data analysis.

Members of the committee include SAWM board members and other SAWM volunteers.

Fisheries and Wildlife Committee

The Fisheries and Wildlife Committee aims to sustain healthy fish and wildlife populations that depend on Shawano Lake and its waters through projects that enhance and maintain shoreland and aquatic habitat and water quality.

Members of the committee include SAWM members as well as representatives from local conservation and citizen organizations.

Education and Communication Committee

The committee is SAWM's out-

reach arm and focuses on informing all stakeholders that use, share, or benefit from the waterways the importance of maintaining them for future generations. It is also responsible for recruiting new members and raising operational funding for the organization.

Its effectiveness will be measured by tracking the annual number of members and fundraising dollars collected.

Buoy Maintenance and Repair

SAWM places and maintains buoys and lights on the lake, channel, and river, taking on the cost of maintenance. Every fall, the buoys are pulled for the season and the lights are removed from the buoys and bridges. Although SAWM expects some loss each year due to age, this past season, there were many more buoys were damaged from being hit with the tops ripped off or worse.

SAWM notes a buoy costs \$146 and a single light for a buoy or bridge is \$277. It estimates it will spend more than \$14,000 this year to replace damaged buoys and lights.

SAWM volunteers also chemically treat seven buoy lanes during the summer.

Follow SAWM Activities, Board of Directors

Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) offers a number of ways to get information on its projects, updates, answers to frequently asked questions and more.

SAWM members receive an email newsletter. Members also receive weekly/biweekly emails that list the activities taking place in the Shawano area.

Website sawm.org

Facebook page open to members and non-members.

Email: shawanolakewi@gmail.com

Phone: 715-304-9130

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SAWM collaborates with the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership, UW Extension, College of Natural Resources Stevens Point, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and Wisconsin Association of Lakes and Onterra LLC.

Golf outing brings out many

This year's Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) Golf Outing is set for June 14 at Golden Sands Golf Course in Cecil.

The annual event is a major fundraiser for the local organization.

Registration at the course, 300 W. Nabor Road, starts at 10 a.m. followed by the Scramble Event at 11:30 a.m. Players can register as singles, couples or foursome at \$100 per person.

A dinner with a choice of tenderloin or walleye starts at 6 p.m. and costs \$30. A super pack raffle costs \$30 for 10 tickets covering three raffles plus the Bonus Raffle.

Charlie's County Market is the title sponsor. Prime Power Sports, Denmark Bank and American Marine are the Hole in 1 sponsors.

Complimentary range balls are provided.

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