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SHAWANO AREA WATERWAYS MANAGEMENT

Bridge design benefits boaters



The new bridge on Airport Road (County Road HHH) over what residents call “The Channel” and what planners call Shawano Creek is complete and marks one of the big accomplishments for Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) in the past year, according to Todd Dobberstein, SAWM board president.

Construction of the bridge started in July 2022 and was completed in November. The new structure has about the same appearance as the bridge over The Channel on North Main Street in Shawano and features wider shoulders to accommodate snowmobilers, hikers and bicyclists. SAWM's major contribution was insisting the bridge be replaced with one that was high enough so that boaters did not have to take down canopies or duck, Dobberstein 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. Local input, including from SAWM, 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 has varied somewhat due to changes in water levels.

Dobberstein said SAWM really appreciated the cooperation of Grant Bystol, Shawano County highway commissioner and said the new bridge will have a big impact for the area. The bridgework cost \$1.8 million with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation shouldering 80% of the costs and the local community picking up the remaining 20%, according to Bystol.

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SAWM nears 'finish line' in resolving water level issue on Shawano Lake

Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) hopes to be nearing the finish line in resolving the eight-year-long conflict over water levels, Todd Dobberstein, SAWM board president, said.

Through Nov. 15, the Shawano Paper Mills dam is operating under what federal regulators call "a temporary amendment of exemption" to maintain the water level of the Wolf River pond at a level of 802.9 feet msl (Mean Sea Level) year-round. The level affects the pool above the dam, The Channel and Shawano Lake.

A lower water level, 802.5 msl, has been imposed in the past, following a complaint of winter damage to property.

The 802.9 level has been SAWM's consistent historic target elevation "which we deem appropriate to ensure safe navigation on the river, channel and lake," according to the group's annual report.

This order was granted in late July 2021. Since that time SAWM, North Eastern Wisconsin Hydro (the dam operators), and project consultant Gomez and Sullivan have been working to finalize a filing with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to secure a permanent amendment to the operating exemption allowing the dam to operate at this higher level in perpetuity.

SAWM's two earlier filings were attempted without success.

"Recently, a very key hurdle was crossed as our consultant and NEW Hydro completed a desktop hydrologic study which was provided to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for review and comment. The DNR indicated they had no concerns with the



The setting sun paints a strong orange hue on the western horizon over Shawano Lake this spring. The water level for the local waterways has been the source of conflict for eight years but Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) believes a permanent water level will be set in the coming year.

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study or operation at the proposed target level of 802.9 msl versus the current "normal" pool height of 802.5," the annual report said.

The hydrologic study compared the flooding potential of the normal pool height of 802.5 vs the proposed value of 802.9. The results displayed no meaningful difference in results according to the technical test of "a 1% Annual Exceedance

Probability event" occurring," according to the SAWM report.

During this time, SAWM members attended board meetings with the surrounding city, county and villages and towns to educate elected officials on the status of this project.

Further consultation with these elected officials will occur in the coming months as SAWM shares

the details of the final draft filing, the report promised.

The draft amendment application will go to the DNR for review in mid August with the final amendment application filed with FERC by the end of 2023.

SAWM has spent nearly \$100,000 on this issue and has deferred other projects and priorities pending its resolution.

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SAWM looks to delivery of new weed harvesting gear

Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) will receive a new custom-built weed harvester and transportation barge from Aquarius Systems, North Prairie, WI, in time for the 2024 boating season.

The waterways organization received a grant from the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Surface Water Grants program providing a 50% match for the new harvester and barge.

The SAWM fleet of two weed harvesters and barges has needed replacing for some time but that need was worsened by operating in lower water levels this year.

The expense was put off while the local organization sought resolution of the water levels controversy for Shawano Lake, The Channel and the Wolf River Pond above the Shawano Paper Mill Dam. Todd Dobberstein, SAWM board president, said SAWM has been saving for this major expense for some time.

The plan is to use the new harvester as the “workhorse” and keep the remaining older one as a backup, Dobberstein said.

SAWM’s existing equipment is at least 15 years old and has reached the limit on maintaining and updating the machines. Some ingenuity has been employed, including relying on a local resident who located a used diesel engine for a needed repair.

The new harvester will have Global Positioning System capabilities, allowing operators to accurately locate their work. 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 water-



Aquatic weeds, including invasive species like Eurasian milfoil, are a primary focus for Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM). The volunteer organization uses mechanical weed harvesters and chemical treatments to keep navigation lanes open.

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ways, mainly along seven buoy lanes. SAWM member Bart DeFere volunteers his time and pays for maintaining the certifications necessary to handle this spraying on behalf of SAWM. The spraying costs would be 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.

A special focus for monitoring and control applications are invasive

species such as the water Eurasian milfoil.

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 undesirable plant growth.

Monitoring activities

SAWM constantly monitors water quality through a variety of activities throughout the year, including:

- Tracks current invasive species and watch for new potential threats.
- Regularly collects samples from streams that flow into Shawano Lake

and ship to the Lab of Hygiene in Madison for analysis of sediment and nutrients, including phosphorous.

- Regularly measures water clarity through SECCI disk readings and measure dissolved oxygen levels at various water depths with equipment purchased and maintained by SAWM.

- Take regular samples of water in areas where chemical treatments have been applied to measure effectiveness.

- Coordinate the Clean Boats Clean Water program, including the training and staffing of volunteers at specific boat landings throughout the summer months with the help of Shawano High School students.



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Impacts have steadily grown in past four years

“Shawano Lake in Northeastern Wisconsin makes significant contributions to local economic vitality,” reads the first line of the executive summary of an economic impact report by the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Department of Economics, dated Spring 2022.

According to the report, total direct and indirect spending in 2021 contributed more than \$39 million to the local economy. The previous year, lake use accounted for 46% of total tourism spending in Shawano County.

The study concedes, “While the impact of the changing residential patterns around the lake, driven by a significant increase in out-of-state buyers, is difficult to quantify, we estimate these homeowners contribute an additional \$3.58 million to the local economy. Further, lake frontage adds approximately \$220,000 to the assessed value of a home – or more than \$179 million in additional home value for property owners. This translates into nearly \$6 million in additional



Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) members and volunteers place buoys on May 18 in The Channel, the Wolf River and Shawano Lake. Buoys and lighted navigation lanes are one of SAWM's services to the area boating community.

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property tax revenue each year.

The lake and waterways' total economic impact has steadily grown, even through the COVID-impacted years of 2019 and 2020, rising from

\$34,411,20 in 2018 to \$39,139,685 in 2021.

The study's conclusion was based on estimating direct spending on lake-related activities, the local

economic impact of those who own second homes or cabins on the lake and the impact that lake frontage has on property values and property taxes.

“A local public good, the lake supports a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities, including fishing, boating and camping,” the study continues, adding the lake's value goes beyond the monetary.

“In addition to direct private sector market-based contributions of non-local visitor spending to regional businesses and their spinoff multiplier, the lake provides ecosystem and natural benefits that accrue to those in proximity of the lake. Perhaps the largest is the role the lake plays as a conduit for outdoor recreation. The lake's playgrounds, beaches, picnic spaces, public docks, boating facilities, and walking and biking trails all contribute significantly to the health and wellness of community members. While difficult to measure, these benefits are nonetheless of vital importance,” the study states.

SAWM is a voice for waterfront property owners

Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) is a volunteer, nonprofit organization that represents waterfront property owners on Shawano Lake, The Channel, and the Wolf River.

Originally formed in 1981 as the Shawano Lake Property Owner's Association, SAWM is active in issues such as aquatic weed management, Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) mitigation, water levels, buoy placement and maintenance for maintaining safe navigation lanes, healthy fish populations and other issues of importance to property owners and boaters.

SAWM also provides weed harvesting to nearly 100 members and recently received a state Department of Natural Resources

Surface Waters Grant to replace one of its harvesters and transportation barges. The new equipment is expected to be ready for the 2024 boating season.

The activities are supported through an active grant program, resulting in the receipt of over \$652,000.

Board meetings are open to the public and are held the second Thursday of each month at Seasons Restaurant and Lounge, 201 Airport Road, Shawano, at 6:30 p.m.

SAWM collaborates with the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership, UW-Extension, College of Natural Resources Stevens Point, Wisconsin DNR, WAMSCO (Waterways Association of Menominee and Shawano Counties), and Wisconsin Associa-

tion of Lakes.

SAWM provides its nearly 700 members with weekly email updates, an association website (sawm.org), Facebook page, an annual report and comprehensive lake management plan.

SAWM recommends regular checks of the web site and Facebook page for information on SAWM projects, updates and answers to frequently asked questions. SAWM can also be reached by email at shawanolakewi@gmail.com or by phone at 715-304-9130.

SAWM pursues its goals, in part, through a contract with Onterra LLC, lake management planners and aquatic environmental specialists, for guidance on planning and executing strategies for maintain-

ing the ecological integrity of area waters.

Priorities for SAWM in 2023 include:

1. Eliminating ice fishing debris left on the ice.
2. Complete the AIS lake studies and implement corrective action steps based on the findings of these studies.
3. Maintain buoy-lighted navigation lanes.
4. Continue private and public nuisance weed harvesting.
5. Complete the purchase and delivery of weed harvesting equipment.
6. Improve communication and increase waterway activity participation with municipal partners.
7. Execute projects to improve fishery and wildlife habitats.



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