



Shawano
Area
Waterways
Management

Update 2021

JUNE 2021

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SHAWANO AREA WATERWAYS MANAGEMENT

A report to the community by SAWM and NEW Media



The biggest challenge for boaters is sometimes getting the boat into the water, but boaters found their way onto Shawano Lake on May 29, including this boat owned by George Corbel, a visitor from Bellevue at the ramp at the Shawano County Park on Shawano Lake. Shawano Area Waterways Management, a local volunteer organization, keeps an eye on water levels, water safety and water quality on Shawano Lake, the Wolf River, and the channel that connects them.

CAROL RYCZEK | NEW MEDIA

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SAWM waits for action on year-round water level request

Looking for 2-year amendment to dam operating permit

The effort to hold water at its historical level year-round in Shawano Lake, the channel and the Wolf River pool above the Shawano paper mill dam started May 28 when Eagle Creek Renewable Energy asked for a two-year amendment to its dam operation permit.

Bill Monfre, a Shawano Area Waterways Management board member, said June 1 he received an email from David Fox, ECRE regulatory process director, confirming the application to the Federal Energy Resources Commission. FERC is the national agency with jurisdiction over dams.

If allowed, the water level at the dam would be maintained at 802.9 feet above mean sea level (msl) year-round. The 802.9 foot level had been the norm since at least 1985.

Monfre stressed that SAWM is not seeking to raise water levels, only a return to the historical level.

Monfre added Fox said ECRE would what it can do to expedite the process. However, it is Fox's opinion that an interim order returning the water level to its higher level was unlikely and the regulatory process will follow its usual course. This includes a public comment period, usually for 15 days.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, SAWM and other local organizations will use the two-year window to find a permanent solution to the ongoing controversy on annual water levels.

This year, records from the dam operator show the water is being maintained at 802.5 msl required by FERC despite local observations of



Water pours through the spillways at the Shawano paper mill dam. Water levels at the dam have been the center of a controversy since May 2015 when Shawano resident Brian Knapp complained to the Federal Energy Resources Commission (FERC) of high water and ice damage to his riverside residence. FERC initially concurred with Knapp and ordered a drawdown of the water at the paper mill dam from 802.9 feet msl to 802.5 feet msl. The 802.9 foot level had been the norm since at least 1985. Since that initial change, there has been pushback from boating groups, waterfront landowners, fishing groups and other organizations representing interests above and below the paper mill dam. Currently, a two-year level of 802.9 msl year-round is being proposed.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

the water being too low.

Typical of recent experiences, George Corbel, Bellevue, didn't have any problems launching his boat. He added he fishes Shawano Lake about twice a year. Corbel said he noticed that in one of his regular fishing spots, his depth finder reported eight feet when it usually says 10, but he cautioned that the depth finder did not always provide exact readings.

Chris Schiavo, Appleton, said water levels only seem to be an issue at boat launches. "Launches are kind of a pain," he said.

Schiavo did not report any problems once he was on the water.

Fox said his company wants to pursue a two-year temporary amendment of its operating permit from the FERC before addressing a permanent change.

FERC initially concurred with Shawano resident Brian Knapp's May 2015 complaint of high water and ice damage to his riverside

residence and ordered a drawdown of the water at the paper mill dam from 802.9 feet msl to 802.5 feet msl.

Since that initial change, there has been pushback from boating groups, waterfront landowners, fishing groups and other organizations representing interests above and below the paper mill dam.

Fox said earlier in May there has not been any negative impact from the higher water level and the dam's operation. The dam's electric's output goes exclusively to power the adjacent Little Rapids Paper Mill, Fox added.

An additional year "will buy us adequate time to get the permitting process done," Fox added.

"Biologically, we've come to terms with the year-round water level and there is no impact at all," Jean Rombach-Bartels, secretary's director for the Wisconsin DNR, said May 12.

Rombach-Bartels is the agency

DID YOU KNOW?

What does "msl" mean? Put simply, according to the National Geographic Society, "Sea level is the base level for measuring elevation and depth on Earth." Mean sea level, the measurement at the heart of the ongoing controversy over water levels in the Shawano Lake area, is calculated from the average of hourly measurements of sea levels over a period of 19 years at various locations, according to the National Geographic web site.

However, "Gauging average global sea level is trickier than sticking a ruler in the depths and noting the day-to-day or year-to-year changes," according to climate.gov, a service of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

administrator with water issue responsibilities for northeastern counties. She agreed with ECRE's plan to apply for a two-year amendment to its current permit.

"It affords us the opportunity, meaning all groups affected, to take a look at the one outstanding issue of impacts of going year-round," she said.

That "one outstanding issue" is the potential flood impact above the paper mill dam, requiring a hydrologic and hydraulic study, she said.

Rombach-Bartels said her agency now has five years of data on the seasonal water level changes and noted there were some impacts.

"The interesting thing about the system is that when they start to fill up the lake, the sturgeon have already spawned as well as walleye, red horse and white bass" but the need is to keep eggs wet and oxygenated, the DNR director said.

Noting fish in Shawano Lake have the same need, Rombach-Bartels said, "A year-round level avoids all of those possible impacts."

This year, records from the Shawano paper mill dam operator show the water is being maintained at the level required by FERC despite local observations of the water being too low.



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Comprehensive plan guides SAWM for next 5-10 years

A management plan, now nearing completion, will guide Shawano Area Waterways Management in addressing issues for boaters, property owners and other users for the next 5-10 years, Tim Day, a SAWM board member involved in guiding the document, said June 1.

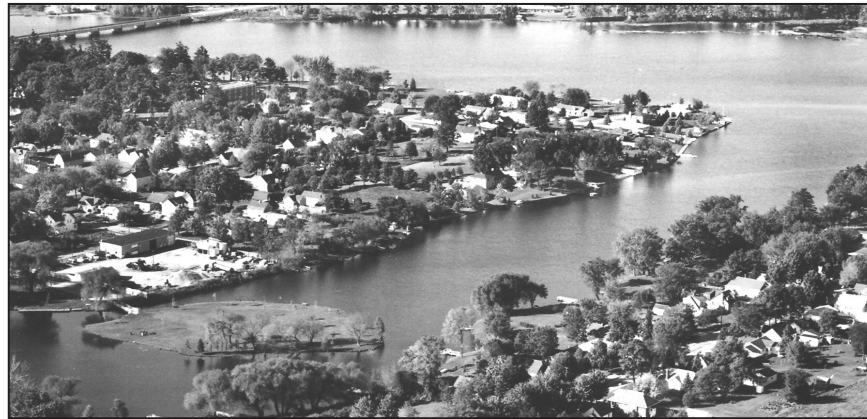
SAWM members will get an update at the June 5 annual meeting.

"The whole purpose of the organization is to maintain our local waterways," Day said. He expects the plan to be revisited and revised in about five years to consider changes in the waterways and new issues that emerge.

Day said the issues most visible to people on the waterways covered in the plan are navigability such as monitoring aquatic plants when quantities get in the way of boating and resolving the six-year-old water level issue.

SAWM also wants to increase education and outreach to everyone around the lake, Day said. He explained that SAWM covers about 50% of property owners on the waterways. He said he appreciated members also donate money beyond the annual \$50 membership fee.

"We want people to be aware of issues that impact water quality" so they



Sunset Island and much of Heritage Park in Shawano were still undeveloped in the early 1970s when this photo of the channel as it enters the Wolf River was taken. The photo was supplied by SAWM.

CONTRIBUTED

will understand and support activities that impact them, he said.

As one example, Day said not only is it a priority from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to have more natural shorelines instead of unfiltered runoff from grass lawns, but SAWM can educate property owners on alternatives and hook them up with resources.

Day explained the plan does two things for SAWM.

The plan evaluated the lake from several perspectives, providing baseline

information leading to a list of items for the non-profit group to address.

The second benefit is that it is "a focus for managing all of the waters" in Shawano Lake, the channel and the Wolf River pool above the Shawano paper mill dam, Day said.

Involved in overseeing the document's completion are three other SAWM board members and three stakeholders representing interests in the waterways including property owners and Ken Vandenplas, the leader of the Shawano Walleyes for

Tomorrow chapter.

After the organization completes its review and accepts the document, Day said SAWM will send it to the DNR for review and acceptance. Agency acceptance will make SAWM eligible for any grant programs that become available.

Onterra, an environmental engineer company, is providing the technical assistance, editorial services and support to create the comprehensive plan. Day said the De Pere company has a long association with SAWM and that familiarity with SAWM as well as DNR regulations has been helpful in getting the plan done.

The plan started in 2019 and included a detailed study of quantity and type of aquatic plants.

Onterra also managed a survey of 1,200 riparian property owners in the waterways in early 2020 with 50-60% of owners completing the survey, considered to be a very good response rate. Day said SAWM aims to conduct a landowner survey every three to five years.

The published document will go to DNR, local communities and other stakeholders and be displayed on the SAWM website, Day said.

SAWM's vision and mission explained

Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and preserving the waters of Shawano Lake, the Wolf River and the channel connecting them on behalf of 1,200 waterfront property owners.

With the support of more than 600 active members, SAWM is the leading advocate for the waterways

and actively engaged with the local communities as well as various state agencies.

VISION

- Caring for Shawano Lake — now and for generations
- Restore, protect and maintain the chemical, biological and physical integrity of the Shawano waterways.

MISSION

- Enhance Shawano Lake property owners' and visitors' understanding of lake issues and increase their involvement in protecting and improving the lake. Communicate/network with all stakeholders.
- Manage native and invasive aquatic plants according to the goals, objectives and activities outlined in the Aquatic Plant Manage-

ment Plan. This is a top priority.

- Improve and maintain water clarity and quality in Shawano Lake.
- Protect, maintain and improve fisheries and fish and wildlife habitat in and around Shawano Lake.
- Promote the preservation and restoration of natural vegetation and scenery along the shoreline.
- Maintain and enhance recreation and navigation.

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Golf outing swells coffers for SAWM programs

Annual fundraiser keeps SAWM afloat

Shawano Area Waterways Management (SAWM) holds its biggest fundraiser June 8 with its 16th annual golf outing, held this year at Shawano Lake Golf Course, Shawano.

Kort Knope, SAWM board member and one of the event's organizers, said the proceeds support the nonprofit organization's programs such as water quality monitoring and development of the organization's comprehensive plan.

Charles County Market returns as the title sponsor.

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Cellcom, Luigi's Pasta & Pizza, Reinhart Food Service, Shawano Leader, Shawano Lake Boat Club, Shawano Shopper.

HHH Bridge design in final stage

Bridge over the channel in Shawano will be replaced in 2022

This will be the last season for the fear of head scrapes under the bridge at County Road HHH.

The bridge, which is low enough that boaters frequently duck into the boat to avoid hitting their heads, will be replaced next year.

It crosses what residents call "the channel" and what planners call Shawano Creek, just north of the East Green Bay Street/Airport Road intersection on the east side of Shawano.

Grant Bystol, Shawano County highway commissioner, said about 90% of the design work has been completed on the new bridge and road approaches and he expects bids to be let this winter.

He said he could not share design details until the plans were finalized, though he did say the bridge height will be raised by 2.2 feet.

He said he would not have a final cost until bids are in. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation will pay 80% of the costs, and the local community will pick up the remaining 20%, he said.

Construction is expected to begin July 12, 2022, and will continue into early November of that year, Bystol said.

An original proposal from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation that called for replacing the current bridge with a version the same size and width met with opposition from the Shawano Area Waterways Management, as well as other boating and fishing enthusiasts, when presented in October 2019.

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, he said.

The new design will be roughly the same bridge structure that is over the channel on North Main Street, he said.

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

The construction will mean that all road traffic will be routed from County Road HHH for the entire project, and there will be some interruptions in boat traffic during parts of the construction process.

Bystol said the July 12 start date was selected to allow lake visitors and residents easy access to the lake for the early part of summer, through the July 4, 2022 holiday.

Unfortunately, he said, the project had to be started in mid-summer so

it could be completed before winter weather shuts it down.

Even during construction, he said, workers will try to minimize weekend work and have the least possible impact on lake traffic.

But, he noted, the bridge will be taken out.

The small 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," he 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."

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