

DRAFT – March 15, 2019

Yahara Lake Level Task Force Recommendations

The Yahara Lake Level Task Force held meetings on 2/4/19, 2/11/19, and 2/18/19 to discuss adaptation and mitigation alternatives for the Yahara Lakes outlined in the [2018 Yahara Chain of Lakes Flooding Technical Work Group Report](#). The process has emphasized public engagement including:

- Working with the County Board of Supervisors to align the task force process with the “Engage Dane” initiative.
- Voice or audio record all meetings
- Establish a common website for task force and related materials
- Encourage public comment at all meetings
- Post all written comments on the website
- Hold public information opportunities throughout Dane County

A public hearing was held on 3/5/19 to gather input. The Task Force meetings and public input led to the following recommendations, which were reviewed and discussed at meetings on March 18th and April 1st and finalized on April 1, 2019.

Public Engagement

Short-term

- Reconvene the task force in 5 years to discuss the status and outcomes of adaptation and mitigation alternatives implemented.
 - Provide update on how many days per year each lake is within its prescribed range
- Provide quarterly updates to the Lake & Watershed commission on status of task force recommendations, current water levels, slow no wake status, aquatic plant harvesting, and other relevant information pertaining to lake levels and flow for the Yahara Lakes.
- Develop a protocol to inform the public when the Tenney Dam and other dams are opened or closed along with the reasoning behind why a change is being made.
- Continue to support a robust website with data and reports.

DREDGING

Short-term

- In collaboration with the DNR and other units of government, Dane County should decide which locations are of highest priority and work to obtain permitting to dredge the Yahara River as needed from Lake Mendota to the Stoughton Dam, seeking to increase flow, maintain seasonal minimums and improve the health of the river whenever feasible.
- The Yahara River is an important and valued resource that provides important spawning, migratory, and nursery habitat for a variety of fish and is home to a number of fish and other

species on a more permanent basis and any dredging should recognize that dredging is an opportunity to improve the resource and not just a means of draining the lakes and that habitat improvements should be incorporated into plans.

- Develop a dredging plan that occurs in phases over several years based on multiple factors including impact on flow, permitting, and dredging logistics.
- Planning and implementation should focus on cooperation with the DNR regulators, fish biologists, and other staff to first identifying and dredging those segments of the river in which dredging would be most helpful in managing flow and would be the most beneficial or least harmful to the river itself.
- DNR and Dane County should facilitate discussions with the Ho-Chunk Nation and Wisconsin Historical Society to discuss the Fish Weir and corduroy bridge near Dyreson Road on the Yahara River.

Long-term

- Establish and fund an ongoing maintenance dredging schedule as necessary to maintain flow capacity in collaboration with the DNR and other units of government.

DAM MANAGEMENT

Short-term

- Operations should continue to be coordinated between DNR, Dane County (owner of the Tenney, Babcock and LaFollette dams), and the City of Stoughton (owner of the Stoughton Dam).
- Collaborate with the City of Stoughton as they assess sediment accumulation near their structure and as they explore options for modifying or removing the dam to accommodate increased recreational access to the river.
- Ensure the integrity of Tenney Dam through improvements that make it capable of holding water to the 100-year water level on Lake Mendota.
- Implement of water level/flow monitoring at the LaFollette Dam.

PUMPING

Short-term

- Proceed with a feasibility study to evaluate the hydraulic and environmental impacts of pumping water from Lake Waubesa
 - Reject routes that would negatively impact the Waubesa Wetlands or other protected features.

- Reject routes that would increase flooding problems experienced by homeowners in Badfish Creek.
- Examine whether it is feasible to share existing infrastructure.

AQUATIC PLANT HARVESTING

Short-term

- Dane County should continue early, vigilant and ecologically-sound mechanical aquatic plant harvesting in compliance with DNR permits to ensure that water flows through the Yahara Chain of Lakes.
- Incorporate aquatic plant harvesting south of the LaFollette Dam into the aquatic plant management plan and DNR permit, rather than relying on an emergency permit.

Long-term

- Continue with mechanical aquatic plant harvesting indefinitely.

LAKE LEVELS

Short-term

- Attempt to manage lake levels at summer minimums in 2019.
- Attempt to manage lake levels at summer minimums until late May or early June.

Long-term

- Re-evaluate lake levels after new data is available from mitigation actions.
- After new data is available from mitigation actions, request DNR review 1979 lake levels in the context of climate change and greater rain events.
- Continue to evaluate lake levels and modeling of watershed hydraulics to measure results of mitigation actions and to identify future improvements if necessary.

LAKE LEVEL MANAGEMENT GUIDE

Short-term

- Update the Lake Level Management Guide for the Yahara Chain of Lakes.
 - Address reinforcement of the Tenney Dam, which allows for management at higher water levels.
 - Incorporate the recommendations for the 7/12/12 peer review as applicable.

- Eliminate any confusion in the guide that flood protection may take priority over other factors.

Long-term

- Explore changes to slow-no-wake (SNW) declaration elevations in recognition that there is little evidence that SNW beyond the standard 200' provides any protection to the shoreline.
 - SNW order would continue to be issued when high water levels create navigational hazards or other health and human safety concerns.

STORMWATER AND INFILTRATION

- Move quickly to implement the recommendations in the Stormwater Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Report
 - Fund and develop pilot projects and identify an entity to administer a watershed stormwater credit trading system
 - Dane County should collaborate with CARPC to map internally drained areas and assess the volume control impact of protecting them from being drained and or developed.
 - Eliminate exemptions from the current stormwater ordinance.
- Work with County Lobbyist and WCA to provide flooding at-risk municipalities an exemption to current law that restricts implementation of stormwater retention practices in excess of State standards.
- Dane County and municipalities should prioritize wetland and land purchases to improve storm water infiltration
 - Promote programs for landowners to protect property and install practices (e.g. wetland reserve program)
 - Evaluate the feasibility of implementing stormwater practices on acquired properties.
 - Work with the Nature Conservancy to use their web-based wetlands and watershed explorer tool to identify and acquire wetland sites to be protected or restored.
- Implementation of stringent policy regarding land use planning and future development to prevent increased runoff rate and runoff volume in the watershed.
- Model and evaluate infiltration practices (wetlands, permeable pavement, rain barrels, rain gardens, etc.) to reduce runoff in the watershed.
- Develop a watershed-wide approach with purchase and restoration of new and historic wetlands; protection of agricultural lands and buffer strips along creeks and rivers; increased infiltration in urban areas with rain gardens, green rooftops, grassy swales; purchase in fee or easement areas suited for underground infiltration basins.
- Pursue the restoration of wetlands throughout the Yahara River sub-watersheds but especially in the Upper Mendota watershed.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Evaluate funding mechanisms to share the responsibility and costs as a community
 - Possibly special assessments are needed to provide additional funding for dredging and other flood mitigation projects.
 - Possibly a fee on property sales.
- Continue to study and implement practices designed to restore historic wetlands in Cherokee Marsh
- Explore purchase and strategic use of Water Inflatable Property Protection devices. Review the Town of Westport's use of Water Inflatable Property Protection devices during the 2018 flood.