

Yahara Chain of Lakes - Lake Level Task Force

Final Recommendations – March 18, 2019

The Yahara Chain of Lakes - Lake Level Task Force was established through County Board Resolution 227, 2018. The task force process emphasized public engagement including:

- Working with the County Board of Supervisors to align the task force process with the “Engage Dane” initiative.
- Creating voice or audio recordings of all meetings
- Establishing a common website for task force and related materials
- Encouraging public comment at all meetings
- Posting all written comments on the website
- Holding public information opportunities throughout Dane County
- Holding a public hearing

The 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 as outlined in the 2018 Yahara Chain of Lakes Flooding Technical Work Group Report. A public hearing was held on 3/5/19 to gather further input. The Task Force meetings and public input led to the following recommendations, which were reviewed and adopted on March 18, 2019.

TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Supervisor Michele Ritt (Co-Chair)
Pam Porter (Co-Chair)
Stefanie Brouwer
Supervisor Tanya Buckingham
Supervisor Yogesh Chawla
Supervisor Chuck Erickson
Supervisor Patrick Miles

David Pfeiffer
Rob Phillips
Supervisor Dave Ripp
Supervisor Sheila Stubbs
Eric Vieth
Topf Wells

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Short-term

- County to commit to an annual status review of adopted task force recommendations as determined by County Executive, County Board Chair and County Board of Supervisors.
- Provide quarterly updates to the Land Conservation Committee, Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee and the Lake & Watershed Commission on status of task force recommendations, current water levels, slow no wake status, aquatic plant harvesting, number of days per year each lake is within its prescribed range, status of coordination with Stoughton on the operation of their dam, and other relevant information pertaining to lake levels and flow for the Yahara Lakes.

- Develop a protocol to inform the public when significant operating or management changes are made to the Tenney Dam and other county-owned dams along with the reasoning behind the change(s).
- 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 determine 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.
- Develop a dredging plan that occurs in phases over several years based on multiple factors including impact on flow, permitting, and dredging logistics. 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. Downstream dredging will be prioritized where possible and within project control.
- 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 regarding the fish weir and corduroy bridge near Dyreson Road on the Yahara River in order to inform dredging that may take place near culturally sensitive features.

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 and embankment through improvements that make it capable of holding water to the 100-year water level (1% annual chance of flooding) 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, fish habitats and environmentally and economically significant conservation easements.
 - Reject planning that would significantly increase flooding problems experienced by residents and agricultural producers in the Badfish Creek watershed.
 - 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 as needed.

LAKE LEVELS

Short-term

- Dane County will continue to implement any tools that may be available to lower lake levels to DNR designated seasonal minimum levels as soon as possible and work to maintain lakes at that level. This directive will be implemented where possible and to the extent that managing any given lake will not create flooding on other lakes or other unintended consequences.

- Land Conservation Committee, Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee and the Lakes & Watershed Commission shall review this directive on an annual basis and make a recommendation to the County Board.

Long-term

- Re-evaluate lake levels after new data is available from mitigation actions.
- After new data is available from mitigation actions, if warranted, 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 not take priority over other factors.

STORMWATER AND INFILTRATION

Short-term

The Task Force encourages policy makers to strengthen stormwater and infiltration practices including but not limited to the following:

- Move quickly to implement the recommendations in the Stormwater Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Report.
- In 2019, fund a consultant to work with the CARPC and Lakes & Watershed Commission stormwater work group to implement the recommendation of the TAC Report to develop a detailed framework for a stormwater credit trading system.
- Work with County Board designee or 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 *Wetlands by Design*, an online tool to help decision-makers identify wetland sites for protection or restoration..
- 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.
- 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.

Long-term

- 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.