

Take Home Notes from the Government Interviews

The following list of bullet points provides a quick interpretation of the comments made during the interview process involving representatives of the Town of Edgewater, Town of Birchwood, and Village of Birchwood. This interpretation reflects the comments made in each section of the interview questions and combines similar responses, but does not identify the government representatives who made the comments. The bullet points reflect what was stated, regardless of the perceived accuracy of the statement. It does not matter if the reader of this summary agrees with each individual statement or not. The intent is to provide a snapshot into what the people interviewed believe in relation to the management actions already implemented and what they are likely thinking about as it pertains to future management actions. It is these bullet points that will have to be considered if management planning and implementation are to move forward.

Lake Use

- Fishing is the main use of Big Chetac and Birch Lakes
- Recreational uses of the lakes: swimming, water sports, etc. are important too.
- The condition of the lakes may impact users of the lake, but only marginally, and only at certain times.
- There is some tension between different lake uses, but it is not clearly definable as being between one specific lake use and another.
- There is an impression that management between 2013 and 2015 was only implemented with improvements to lake aesthetics in mind and did not consider possible impacts on the fishery.
- Tourism (resort use) has not declined significantly since management began in 2013.
- Day use and tournament use has declined since management began in 2013.

Fisheries and Wildlife

- It has been harder for fishermen to achieve a satisfactory level of success since management began in 2013, but opinions are mixed as to whether this is directly and solely attributable to the management.
- Management from 2013-15 changed the existing patterns of fish, particularly in Big Chetac, making it harder for fishermen to be successful in their usual spots.
- It is generally thought that the size of panfish is down in the lake.
- Management of CLP has reduced the amount of food available to smaller fish which is why they remain small.
- Regardless of the causes of a lower quality fishing experience, the perception is that negative changes in the fishery are the result of management that began in 2013
- There is generally not a lot of concern that wildlife has been negatively impacted by the management except for aquatic bugs and geese.
- There is concern that future management will impact wildlife more directly and a feeling there has not been enough study to identify what these impacts could be.

Aquatic Plants and Aquatic Plant Management

- Opinions were mixed on whether the amount of vegetation in the lakes (either too much or too little) was an issue or not.
- Some said that in 2016 aquatic vegetation was great, but it has been and still is declining overall, but this may not be entirely the result of management that started in 2013.
- There are certain areas on the lakes that have too much vegetation at certain times during the year.
- No one particular stakeholder should be given the sole power to determine when aquatic plant growth or the lack of aquatic plant growth is an issue that needs to be addressed; it should be a group consensus.
- Opinions were mixed as to what impacts CLP management from 2013-15 had on the aquatic plant community: some said bad, some said good, and others didn't have an opinion
- The biggest concern about future herbicide use is that too many weeds will be taken out and the lakes won't be able to recover which in turn will reduce fishing quality even further.
- Harvesting is the preferred management strategy and would likely garner greater support from the government entities because it is felt that there is more control of management actions, and less potential for unintended consequences brought on by management.
- Not all government representatives are completely opposed to the use of herbicides but they do want more assurances that future chemical management will not cause harm to the fishery, native aquatic plants, and other aspects of the ecosystem.
- Government representatives want more proof (examples from other lakes) that chemical management will work long-term to reduce aquatic vegetation and positively affect water quality.
- Management support from the Town of Birchwood and the Village of Birchwood would depend on the level of expected benefit to property owners in these jurisdictions.
- There is not a lot of support for the formation of a Lake District to aid in aquatic plant or water quality management. Some would be willing to discuss it, but do not feel it is necessary at this time.

Water Quality and Water Quality Management

- Green water is not necessarily unhealthy water
- Water quality probably does need to improve, but not for all uses, nor at all times.
- Desirable improvements include less thick green water, less smell, and less dense weed beds that interfere with navigation, or at least shorter time periods when these things are considered an issue
- CLP management implemented between 2013 and 2015 has had minimal impact (if any) on improving water quality in Big Chetac and Birch lakes.
- Future management of CLP and/or other management actions may improve water quality, but it is feared that it will likely have unintended negative consequences to other aspects of the lake ecosystem.
- Support for the application of alum is limited, primarily due to a need for more information about what the impacts to the ecosystem would be, and how effective for how long it would be. Need to know what the cost/expected benefit ratio would be.

Information and Monitoring

- Government officials get information to support or not support management actions on Big Chetac and Birch lakes from a variety of sources including the BCABLA, WDNR, existing lake studies (from Big Chetac and other lakes), residents of the lake, lake users, fishermen, friends, and individual research.

- The most credible sources of information include: people using the lakes, WDNR studies and other scientific lake studies, personal experience, and professionals who are supposed to know what they are talking about.
- Least credible sources of information include: hearsay, opinion-based comments, public surveys (paper), BCABLA, specific people who complain about everything
- Information from the WDNR is not construed as being completely accurate and truthful, not intended to deceive because of past actions, lack of adequate information about specific issues, because they will only say what they think people want to hear, or because they don't have the same agenda as the lake people do
- Information from the BCABLA is not construed as being completely accurate and truthful, not intended to deceive simply because it is felt that they are not presenting the whole story, only the information that supports what they want to see done, and in many cases it is presented with an air of superiority or is hard for the average person to understand.
- The credibility of information from specific individuals depends on who is sharing it. Some are twisting information to support their agenda or are selfish in nature, but others, particularly those experiencing things first hand are as credible as any other source.
- Reasons for wanting change or wanting the status quo are different for each entity.
- Monitoring should include as many parts of the ecosystem as possible and not just in the treatment areas. Parameters should include but are not limited to water quality, fisheries studies, aquatic plants, wild rice, wildlife, algae, and herbicides.

Stakeholder Involvement /Discussion

- The BCABLA did inform some people likely to be impacted by management actions, but really only after the management decisions had already been made.
- The BCABLA should have reached out and sought input from stakeholders much earlier in the process of management planning.
- Questions remain with some stakeholders as to whether any management is even needed, and if it is, what form it should take.
- The BCABLA only shared the information necessary to support their position that management using herbicides needed to be done, and then presented it in a manner that was hard for the average person to understand.
- For the most part, government officials were unhappy with the level of involvement from the WDNR.
- The WDNR only supported the position of the BCABLA and did not present alternatives, long-term impacts, or possible consequences of management.
- The WDNR was not viewed as a neutral third party in the management discussion and it was felt they should be as they are the most knowledgeable.
- The BCABLA and WDNR never answered the most important question being asked – How will the management impact the fishery?
- There is some concern that the make-up of the BCABLA Board and its membership and whether it heavily favors property owners on Big Chetac Lake, making input from Birch and Little Birch lake property owners minimal.
- The WDNR or a third party (maybe a consultant) should offset what is viewed as biased information from the BCABLA.
- There is a feeling that because the BCABLA wasn't really required to reach out to the Towns and Village, their efforts to do so were only half-hearted and they had no intention of listening to concerns.

Future Management Discussion and Planning

- Should involve as many stakeholders as possible (BCABLA, local Towns, Village, property owners on all three lakes, fishermen and recreational users, WDNR, Counties, Resort owners)
- May need to back up all the way to where a decision is made that management is really necessary, even if it takes longer
- Rather than just informing stakeholders after decisions have already been made, management discussions should include interested stakeholders in the decision making process from the beginning.
- Those providing public input need to know they are being heard and that planners are acting on what they hear.
- Regular meetings should be held to discuss and seek input into management actions.
- With the exception of the Town of Birchwood, all government representatives interviewed stated that they would be willing to participate in future management discussion and planning if invited.
- The Town of Birchwood would be more willing to participate if management proposals directly involved their constituency.
- Final management decisions should be based on general consensus of the stakeholders involved in the planning process, not just the BCABLA and the WDNR.