

BIG CHETAC AND BIRCH LAKES ASSOCIATION STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE MEETING MARCH 02, 2017 MINUTES (FINAL)

Facilitator: Dave Blumer (DB), LEAPS

*Minutes prepared by LEAPS based on a digital recording of the meeting.

Participants:

BCABLA: Mark Robinson, Bill Miller (by phone)

Birch Lake: Steve Longacre

Town of Birchwood: Romaine Quinn

Village of Birchwood: Virginia Hurckman (not present)

Town of Edgewater: Scott Spaeth

Fred Thomas Resort: Julie Thomas-Telitz

Maple Terrace Resort: Jim Delmedico

Red Cedar River Partnership: Gerry Johnson

WDNR: Alex Smith (AS)

Guest: Pete Baribeau – Birch Lake Resort and Campground

Stakeholders Committee Meeting Presentation and Materials are available on the Big Chetac and Birch Lakes Association webpage at www.bcabla.com

Approval of January Stakeholders Meeting Minutes

DB – Minutes of January meeting were written up and sent to members for review in early February.

Motion made to approve January Minutes for distribution by Bill Miller, seconded by Julie Thomas-Telitz

Motion passed – minutes can be posted publicly now.

Facilitator's Update

Update on Big Chetac and Birch Lakes LPL Grant

DB: We do not know yet. The grant failed to score high enough to be funded in the first round, but there is a second round where it has a good chance of being funded. Expect to know by early April 2017

Public Surveys (16 min, 30 seconds)

Questions were asked during the January meeting about the results of the Town of Edgewater Survey form 2015. After seeking approval from the Town of Edgewater in a meeting with Pete Baribeau in early February, Dave reviewed the first 250 of what were more than 500 surveys returned during the Town of Edgewater distribution. Dave also reviewed results from three other surveys: 2009 SEH Survey, 2011 BCABLA Survey, and 2015 BCABLA Survey.

C1: Survey is worthless; don't spend much time on it.

DB: I consider it another source of information, particularly the comments that were made on it, not so much the responses to the questions.

The first 250 surveys were scanned by Bill Zimmer and sent to Dave last fall. Despite concerns about the validity of the Town of Edgewater Survey, results from the yes/no question related to support for chemical management was presented (only 250 of the 500+ surveys, more than 900 sent out with the tax bills), along with a general review of the comments. Comments included by respondents on this survey were well in line with comments received on other surveys and during the summer interview project Dave completed and are the resource of most interest.

- 154/236 responses were in favor of chemical management of CLP in the Town of Edgewater Survey.
- 82/236 were against chemical management, and 14 of the 250 chose not to respond to the questions.
- 95/250 surveys included names and/or contact information

Two handouts were distributed to Stakeholder Committee Members: 1) Survey Results, 2) What BCABLA Constituents Want to Know More About

DB: Other surveys show majority support for chemical management as well, but there are still a lot of questions about it.

Approval rating for operations of the lake association on the 2009 SEH and 2015 BCABLA Survey: >60% and 78% respectively.

C1: Don't lean on survey responses as responses are very low, but agrees that comments are very telling

C2: Survey results are critical, even if the response rate is low because the responses are from those who are interested in what is going on – so they are credible.

C1: Agrees with C2, but did not receive a 2015 BCABLA survey to fill out.

C2: Surveys sent to members of the Association only

C1: Does that mean that non-members of the Association have no vested interest?

DB: Time out on the exchange! Point is valid. Everyone should be included in a survey of the constituency. This was the case in some of the surveys but maybe not in all.

C3: Survey went to everyone on Big Chetac Lake, 400 property owners, 60% return rate. The state recommends including riparian and property owners in the survey as they are the number one stakeholders on the lake.

C4: How many of the possible survey respondents are absentee owners?

C3: All data is on the webpage, including time on the lake. The 2015 BCABLA survey did not indicate any difference in responses based on time on the lake. Let's not belabor the point of who it went to, instead what can we take away from the comments on all of them as a whole.

C5: No one in the Town of Birchwood or Village or on Birch Lake was surveyed in 2015. That why they were upset.

DB: That is one of the things we want to remedy now, in this new planning process.

C4: Survey results represent roughly 1/3 of the Town of Edgewater, no one on Birch Lake or in the Town of Birchwood then the comments may be good, but they are not representative. This needs to be worked on. It is difficult to use these results to show an indication of overall support for the management actions that might be implemented going forward.

DB: You wanted more information on the surveys, I gave it to you, let's move on.

Participant Update/Comments/Concerns

Newsletters/News Releases (3 min)

DB: Preparation of Newsletters/News Releases, Minutes being public. Draft of BCABLA news release, let Mark R. comment on it.

C6: Background on the committee, process and grant, general flavor of what is going on now based on what was done in the past.

DB: Final version will be shared with the Committee when I have it.

C5: Will post minutes from the last meeting now that they have been approved.

DB: Other news releases? Towns do it at tax time, so it is too late this year. BCABLA working on a newsletter.

Stakeholders Group Representatives Updates (22minutes, 30 seconds)

DB: Now is the chance to share what you have heard

Julie Thomas Telitz (Fred Thomas Resort, Big Chetac Lake): would like to see data from other lakes that are doing herbicide treatments of CLP.

AS: Asking specifically for CLP because other lakes (like Lake Elwood) are using a different herbicide to target a different plant (EWM)

C7: What is happening on Lake Minnetonka? Plants building up a resistance? Becoming a hybrid?

DB (and others): Lake Minnetonka is EWM, keep EWM out of Big Chetac, or it is a whole new ball-game.

DB: The Town of Edgewater will have their chance to report, but I want all of you to know that Pete and I met after the January meeting in person to discuss a few things.

Romaine Quinn (Town of Birchwood): The dam on Little Birch Lake and the boat landing are going to be repaired in early 2017. They plan to coffer the dam, so there will be little if any drawdown necessary. Time frame is as soon as possible. Mud gate is a concern because of its lack of use, it may not operate correctly. There is a 50/50 costshare with Sawyer County. Washburn County not happy with the split. More of the lake in Sawyer County than in Washburn County.

Alex Smith (DNR update): A drawdown might be good for the lake, even a small one, as it promotes post-emergent vegetation, but recognizes that it could cause hardships for some people on the chain. Management plan explored a 6" drawdown of the lake. Static water levels are not good for a lake. Consider drawdown in future management. But if it was done, consideration would need to be given for when and how long.

C5: How long does a drawdown need to occur to be beneficial?

DB/AS: Don't recall what is in the 2010 Management Plan, but can discuss it more during the next meeting to be primarily about water quality.

Gerry Johnson (Red Cedar River Watershed): Gave an update of efforts of this committee with the Red Cedar River Watershed Partnership. Most of the concerns are farming south of Rice Lake, but the group

recognizes headwater contributions as well – overall there is a goal of a 67% reduction in phosphorus entering the Red Cedar River in 10 years. We are in year two of that time frame.

AS/DB: Shameless plug for the Red Cedar River Watershed Conference on March 9th in Menomonie.

Mark/Bill (BCABLA): Communicate what is going on in community and Association. Newsletter is coming out soon.

Jim DeImedico (Maple Terrace Resort on Birch Lake): Cranberry growers in Jackson County just got a million bucks to build fences to keep 18 elk out of their cranberry bogs. Why is it so hard to get money for lake management? Has a couple of businesses in Jackson County that have kept him busier than expected. Bought Maple Terrace Resort 6 years ago. Lives in Westby, WI. Loves Birchwood and the lake, and people would like to spend more time here to reduce headaches.

Steve Longacre (Fishermen, Birch Lake): Agrees with Jim. On Little Birch for 7 years, family place for 60 + years on Big Birch, now bought his own place on Big Birch Lake. Half a dozen phone calls from constituents. The word is out. Birch property owners want to be part of the survey. Other audience is fishermen: a few comments about the extremes: No fish in the lake, thousands die every time there is a treatment. The committee to them is a source of information. More information is good! Start reading, instead of jumping to conclusions.

Pete Baribeau/Scott Spaeth (Town of Edgewater): Scott brought up that Linda Zillmer says she was denied membership in the Lake Association. Denied an application. She is a property owner with waterfront. Steve has heard it too.

C2: There is no application.

C6: This is in response to what happened at the Annual Meeting in 2016. Linda asked to join and immediately vote and was told that she had to be a member at the start of the meeting to be a voting member. Since she had not paid dues yet, she was not a voting member during the meeting.

DB: For every lake association I am aware of, if you want to pay your dues you can be a member. You can't exclude anyone without risk of losing status as a qualified lake association.

C8: Just looking for something to respond to Linda's comments at future meetings.

C3: Comes to just about all meetings of the BCABLA and is always allowed to speak her mind.

DB: I was told by Virginia at the last meeting that Linda was going to get a hold of me. She never did that I am aware of.

General flurry of comments: I'm the lucky one. General agreement that Linda has impacted many on the committee.

C7: Validate why he is here. He has heard stories from patrons of the resort including a 102 year old patron who recently passed away. Fishing is still robust, but fish are getting smaller.

C2: Information presented at the last meeting said fish were getting smaller statewide.

AS: Fish biologist could clarify a few things like size structure – 10 bag limit. A comment was once made by Max Wolter that removing some of the smaller bluegills would be helpful. There may be stunted bluegills in the Chetac system. But this is a state-wide phenomenon.

C7: Why is that? General murmur – overharvest

C1: I disagree, fishing pressure is way down from past years. Using fish remains from 2016, fish catch is down at his resort.

C8: Ice fishing is down this winter

C2: Has an opposite opinion. Many fish caught in 2016.

C1: Not necessarily less fish, just less fishermen. Way less time fishing. Patrons golf, ride four-wheelers, more broad in what they spend their time doing.

C4: Discussed changing lake uses during the last meeting. Great class of young crappies, but they are all small going back into the lake. Larger ones are spotty.

AS: That's why WDNR supports walleye stocking. Broader studies on fish being done across the state. Maybe Max can shed light on some of them. Even smaller bag limits or combined bag limits. Over harvesting verses natural variables, lots of other studies going on out there.

C1: Has heard discussion about increasing the number of crappies specifically that can be kept to reduce numbers of small fish. (Only speculation and heresy not clearly defined fact).

General Consensus: Bring Max Wolter into one of these Stakeholder Committee Meetings

Discussions

Aquatic Plant Management (CLP Management) Presentation (DB) (50 minutes)

DB: Fishing is important but it is time to move on to the plant management presentation. Maybe we need to have another meeting just to discuss the fishery with professionals.

Presentation about what we know, where we are, what has transpired to date, etc regarding CLP management and aquatic plants in the lake.

Handouts given: BCABLA approval and adoption document for the 2010 Lake Management Plan with sections highlighted; Interview responses from government entities and resort owners; Rice Lake Harvesting Report.

- a. Comments Slides 9-11

- i. AS: CLP levels were really down going into 2015 so management reductions were based on an absence of CLP more than on reducing the amount of herbicide and surface area to treat.
 - ii. C10: I thought at least three years' worth of management was necessary, so why reduce the size of the treatment area in 2015?
 - iii. AS/DB: Three is suggested to identify a turion reduction, but it could be 2 or it may be 10. We just don't know. Each lake is different.
- b. Comments Slides 14-16
 - i. C1: Shouldn't there be three new species (49 instead of 48 in 2014, up from 46 in 2008)
 - ii. DB: No, because a species found in another part of the lake, but not previously found in the North Bay makes up the third new plant species identified in 2014.
 - iii. C1: How can coontail still be the most frequently identified plant species in 2014, when it had major declines since 2008, likely due to management?
 - iv. DB: There is a lot of coontail, and even though there is much less, it is still the most frequent plant species identified.
 - v. AS: In both the 2008 and 2014 summer surveys all the diversity is near the inlets of the tributaries. Once you get past a few hundred feet from these areas, diversity drops rapidly. Plant diversity and density was down all over the lake in 2014 due to the harsh winter (lots of snow and late ice out)
 - vi. DB: The Chetek Chain of Lakes is similar. All the diversity is where the tributaries come in.
 - vii. AS: The good plants we are trying to keep cannot handle the disturbances including poor water clarity.

C3: 4:30 is only a couple of minutes away, jump to the end of the presentation!

DB: refers to Rice Lake handout, less harvest of CLP more of native plants.

DB: water quality may have improved but lots of other variables!

DB: last slide – questions to talk about – discussion

AS: Lots of monitoring, never detected herbicide in the control areas. After 2014 winter lots of plants saw reductions not directly impacted by herbicide in his professional opinion. New Tech Letter says no more large scale herbicide application. Pursue other things that might improve water quality first.

C10: Like what?

AS: Application of alum. Harvest works, but too much CLP to do it efficiently.

DB: Rice Lake harvesting is working but they use three to harvest 110 acres. But are doing it right now and having a positive impact. We can revisit plant management at the next meeting if we have to.

C4: Who pays for management in Rice Lake?

DB: A Lake District tax levy that collects about \$100,000 annually. But draw on lots of tax payers.

Pete Baribeau and Alex Smith left around 4:35pm

DB: went back to past studies that have been mentioned by constituents.

Heiskary and Valley 2012: Does CLP removal improve water quality? Yes but likely only in shallow lakes with little aquatic plant growth (like Big Chetac). Should have seen an improvement during the three years of management. Some say yes there was an improvement, but other variables like lots of rainfall likely impacted water quality during the same time frame.

Lake Elwood 2014: Too much herbicide use likely caused the crash of panfish in the lake. 10 years of aggressive EWM management took out more than EWM. Moral of the story overuse of anything can cause problems. Monitor for young of the year fishes may be a way to watch this in Big Chetac and Birch.

General Consensus in 2017 – No herbicide management, but possibly harvesting.

Open Discussion (30 minutes)

C4: Where does the money come from to support harvesting?

C3: BCABLA and individual property owner money would pay, no grant money available. Not a tax everyone pays. Individual property owners (like those by the DNR landing) who want harvesting would pay.

C4: How many is quite a lot of property owners?

C3: Contracted harvesting would be limited simply due to the availability and size of machines.

C4: How many property owners are ready now? Lake wide?

C3: Hard to say until they are asked and until this is an option we are willing to pursue? Ask Dave how much can be done realistically?

C8: What is the charge?

C3: Cost would vary depending on what the company has to do? Cutting only is cheaper than cutting and disposal. If lake association disposes, it is cheaper to do. Can only do a few acres realistically

DB: Three to five hundred an acre is the estimated cost. Probably no more than 10-20 acres in 2017. Company in Chippewa Falls has two 5-ft harvesters. Can we get them at the optimum time is yet to be known. How much they can harvest is dependent on a lot of factors. Probably 0.5 to 1.5 acres an hour. Small-scale to try it out is a good idea.

C4: Where does the plant material get dumped?

DB: Away from the lake. Farmers field, gravel pit, dump etc.

C4: Is this possible in 2017? Assuming people are ready to go? Why didn't we know this three months ago?

C3: Ask Dave about the process. This is part of working up the new management plan. It is a process. The lake association has not driven this action, it is under the complete control of Dave.

DB: That is true comment. This activity and process is under my control as I see fit, my vision.

C4: Having a small group of property owners ready to go with harvesting is consistent with what I have heard.

C3: Viable on Big Chetac and Birch to relieve navigation issues.

C8: Town of Edgewater has \$5500 available. Harvesting would not be hard to sell.

C3: Want to keep all management options open – harvest and herbicides.

C3: 2016 Tech Review Letter from the DNR states that water clarity needs to improve before native plants will come back. Alum might be the answer.

DB: No discussion on alum at this time, next time. Harvesting is a small-scale activity. Could be done in 2017. Benefits, try it out to see.

C10: Isn't this already been shown to work?

DB: Yes, Harvesting can remove CLP, if that is your only goal. Nuisance relief. 600 acres is not realistic.

C10: Isn't the goal to improve water quality? That's what was heard at the previous meeting. Does harvesting on a small-scale improve water quality?

DB: No.

C3: But it can give us the opportunity to see what other role it could play on a small-scale basis.

C6: Try it before moving into a larger harvesting operation like owning the equipment. Take a measured approach.

C3: Some grant monies available to purchase harvesting equipment if it is determined to be useful on the lakes.

DB: Logistics is the big thing with harvesting.

C8: Not a hard sell for harvesting. Herbicides are not supported.

C2: Different direction. Been to numerous meetings. This is very complicated, how do we get this out accurately to the general public. Too much to take in. Perception that the public is against what the Lake Association is doing. No clear answers. People in the association with the WDNR are coming up with the

plan. We need to trust the professionals to do this and then share the data with the public. Lake Association is already working to come up with the best management path.

C4: No one wants to be told what is best for them. Put it in front of the people and let them decide. Put this out on a public forum.

C2: Lake Association has a great webpage.

C7: Has been reading the notes. We need someone to condense the data down to something the general public can digest. 1 page, otherwise it is too overwhelming. Survey was a success, even though Pete didn't like it much. Has confidence in Dave and Alex. Needs to know the fish are not going to die. Year one of treatment was a mistake! Don't want this to happen again. Need a person to watch over this. Native plants must be sustainable.

C2: How do you condense this down? Trust the professionals.

DB: The thought is great, but a large contingency of people don't trust the Lake Association and the WDNR, at least that is what is reflected in the survey data and interviews.

C8: Let me know if you want me to ask for the money from the Town of Edgewater.

DB: It is 5:00pm.

C10: What is our objective? What is our goal? If water quality is the goal, how does harvesting help? Why do it?

DB: There may be multiple objectives. We need to figure that out.

C3: Goals and objectives are still based on Water Quality, but there may be steps to get there that have different objectives. We need to get to those we missed the first time around. Use the resources we have to make the best decisions we can.

DB: Need to get all of you to understand what is happening to help figure out how to get to the rest.

C10: What needs to be done to meet the objectives, broaden our perspectives. We need to figure out how to get closer to what we want. What needs to be done to get there?

C3: Start with the new Technical Review Team Letter at the next meeting.

DB: Next meeting last Wed or Thursday of March.

Meeting ended. 2 hours, 2 minutes, 42 seconds.