

Final Minutes: Big Chetac And Birch Lake Association Stakeholders Committee Meeting March 30, 2017

Facilitator: Dave Blumer, LEAPS

Minutes prepared by LEAPS on April 18, 2017 based on a digital recording of the meeting. Revisions were made on April 24, 2017 after review by Committee Members.

Call to Order/Roll Call

Participants:

BCABLA: Mark Robinson, Bill Miller (phone)

Birch Lake: Steve Longacre

Town of Birchwood: Romaine Quinn

Village of Birchwood: Virginia Hurckman

Town of Edgewater: Scott Spaeth

Fred Thomas Resort: Julie Thomas-Telitz

Maple Terrace Resort: Jim DelMedico

Red Cedar River Partnership: Roger Menk (for Gerry Johnson)

WDNR: Alex Smith

1) Meeting called to order at 2:30pm at the Birchwood Senior Center

Minutes from February 2017 meeting held on March 2, 2017 were approved. Julie made the motion to approve; Bill seconded. Motion passed, all in favor. The minutes from that meeting can now be posted on the various websites and other locations.

Dave suggested that people are looking at the minutes and referenced the email sent by John Haugen regarding the process.

This email generated some discussion based on the perch population being stronger now and bugs found in perch's stomach.

Comment (C) – At least one person thought that the reference to bugs being back in the perch was related to the attempt to say the three years of treatment caused the bugs to go away.

This is has not been substantiated or officially recognized, but Alex admitted that there is not a lot of "bug data" out there to compare with.

In general, the Committee was in agreement that it was a positive email and a positive step for the Committee, but continued to echo the sentiment among many that there are concerns about impacts to the fishery in the system.

2) Facilitators Update

Lake Planning Grant – Dave and Alex informed the Committee that the Lake Management Planning grant submitted in December 2016 would be funded with the start date proactive back to Feb 15, 2017. This means that all the activities included in that project: Aquatic Plant Survey in Birch and Little Birch Lake, water quality testing at three sites (inlet to Birch, outlet at the dam, and Deep Hole in Birch Lake), Resort Owners Creel Survey, Shoreline Evaluation, and Stakeholders Committee Meetings will be started in 2017. As a result a new contract with LEAPS will have to be drawn up and approved at the next meeting. Water quality volunteers are needed for Birch and Big Chetac Lakes.

Official WDNR Ceded Territories Creel Survey – Dave and Alex informed the Committee that there would be an official WDNR Creel Survey completed on just Big Chetac Lake in 2017. This means that one person will be stationed on the lake five days a week for 40 hours to collect fishing pressure and success information beginning with the Fishing Opener on May 6th until October 31, 2017, and then again from December 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018. This is only on Big Chetac, Birch Lake would be done a year or two later.

C) How is the public being made aware of the WDNR Creel Survey?

Dave didn't know the answer. Some on the committee felt that it should be publicized in newsletters and local paper. Make sure people know this is a positive thing. This is not an activity focused on any illegal activities on the lake so there are no wardens, no checking of fish licenses or bag limits, only data collection of fishing time, pressure, and catch rates. The survey includes DNR spring fyke netting with walleye fin clips to help establish walleye populations in the lake. It is important to make sure resort owners know about this. Post it at landings, maybe in the school newspaper, and through the Lake Associations, Chamber, Towns, and Village.

Resort Owners Creel – Dave started working on a draft survey modeled after the WDNR creel survey form that is used when a Ceded Territories Creel Survey is officially implemented on a body of water.

This form generated a lot of discussion. The following things were discussed and changes suggested.

- make it even simpler
- make sure it includes all the lakes
- only divide the lake into four areas: North Basin, Central Basin, South Basin, and Birch and Little Birch Lakes
- include all the resorts around the lake, or do not include any
- no muskies in the lake

C) Should this be a daily survey or a weekly survey?

Dave feels it should be daily. If it is only done once a week, then it will be less accurate. If it is only done one or two days out of the week, it will likely not reflect the true effort and success/catch information due to choosing only the good or bad days when filling out the data.

C) How should it be distributed to resort clientele?

Some felt it should just be put out on the check-in desk, fish house, or in the cabins with instructions rather than handed to each client when they check in. Resort owners don't always see their clients when they check in, so handing it to them may be difficult.

Dave feels they should be handed to the clients at the beginning of their stay, somehow, but realizes this may not be the easiest method of distribution. He did say that the forms would be printed and delivered to the Resorts every week or two so they wouldn't have to print them off. Completed surveys would be collected at the same time.

C) How do we get these forms to the Resorts by fishing opener?

Julie suggested a meeting with the Chamber which is made up of a lot of the Resort Owners. Julie would check on available times and dates for this meeting. Dave will present it to the Resort Owners.

C) What about non-resort fishermen that would like to fill out the survey?

It may be possible to put forms at other locations including bait stores, but this makes it easier for false data to be collected. Since there is already a DNR creel survey going on, many of these fishermen will be included in the WDNR Creel Survey, so these folks would not be totally left out. Leaving it with the resorts provides a little more control over the data.

NOTE: May 1, 2017 has been established as the date for this meeting. 6:30pm at the Birchwood Village Hall. Dave will check with Virginia and Kathy to reserve the space.

NOTE: Alex forwarded an email from Gene Hatzenbeler-WDNR who is in charge of the WDNR Creel Survey Program. Gene had a couple of comments including making sure that the Resort Survey was named something substantially different from the WDNR Creel Survey so people don't think they are answering questions for the same survey. He is concerned that people might feel overwhelmed by too much contact, and the DNR survey is the most important one. He also suggested adding the amount of time fished for each species and to actually measure the fish, not just do an average estimate. This would give better species information. He felt that this survey (as constructed) would only track catch and harvest rates over time. I (Dave) personally think this is what we are most interested in. What people fish for, what they catch, and what they keep. And also did they think they had a good or bad day of fishing.

Dave will revise the form prior to the May 1, 2017 meeting of the Chamber and send it out to the Committee for Review.

Water Quality Volunteers – Volunteers are needed to collect water quality data on Big Chetac and Birch lakes. Big Chetac and Birch are part of the Citizen Lake Monitoring Network. Dave asked about the current volunteers collecting data on Big Chetac. Apparently Pete Bratos is the new and only volunteer on Big Chetac Lake. More volunteers are needed. Scott Spaeth and Steve Longacre are willing to help. Dave will try to organize a date and time to meet with Pete and any other volunteer to collect water samples.

Young of the Year Panfish Survey – There was a possibility of applying for some new grant funding to start a Young of the Year Panfish Survey on Big Chetac which many believe would be a great addition to pre and post management activities on the lakes. Dave informed the group that the grant program that could have purchased the required mini-fyke nets was not appropriate for this task. The specific grant is for endangered and threatened species throughout the state, not species like bluegills, even though there have been changes to this species over the last decade or more throughout the state.

Despite the lack of immediate grant funding, Mark Robinson felt that there was still enough interest and energy to make something like the Young of the Year Survey happen, but that it might need to be led by a Fisheries Committee that could be formed by the BCABLA. More work will be done to see if the Survey can be set up in some fashion as it was felt pretty strongly, that if chemical management again is employed on the lakes, that the survey would be a “must do” action. Nets cost in the neighborhood of \$400/piece and are not real complicated to put in the lake. The WDNR might help with this activity, which is usually done in August for panfish. If it is not setup for 2017, it could be a part of the new lake management plan and included in requests for grant funding under the new management plan.

3) Participant Updates/Comments/Concerns

Newsletters/News Releases/Webpage Postings

The BCABLA newsletter is currently under construction and soon to be done. A newspaper article was put in the local Birchwood paper by the BCABLA. Bill Miller has everything related to the last three Stakeholders Committee meetings posted on the BCABLA webpage.

The Towns and Village may still need to post past Stakeholders Committee information. Dave will follow up with the Clerks to hopefully make the process of posting the minutes easier. Perhaps a link to the BCABLA webpage is all that is needed on the individual Town and Village pages. Again, Dave will try to follow-up on this.

NOTE: Some follow-up by Dave shows that the Village has the January Stakeholders Committee minutes posted, but nothing more. I like the format of the Village posting and will try to model future minutes after it. The Town of Edgewater has a link to the BCABLA website which has all the Stakeholders Committee materials. The Town of Birchwood also has a link, but not the official minutes.

Town of Edgewater – Linda Zillmer was at the last Town meeting.

Fred Thomas Resort - Julie has not forwarded the minutes to the Chamber Website. Hasn't had a lot of contact with the other resorts, but some. Almost all of the resorts on the Chain are members of the

Chamber of Commerce, so the meeting set for early May will bring them up to speed on what is happening.

Maple Terrace Resort – Jim has heard from some of his constituents, mostly echoing comments from others. Some still feel that sneaky stuff is going on and wonder why the meetings are not open to the public. Mentioned John Lozier as being really interested in what is happening and concerned that the public won't have adequate input. Jim also mentioned that one of his long-time clients has about 30 years' worth of fishing data from his trips to Big Chetac. Jim would like to get a copy of that data, and will try to do so.

Village of Birchwood – Virginia indicated that Linda Zillmer was the last Village board meeting as well. She was given 5 minutes to speak. Linda again indicated that she thought the Stakeholders Committee meetings should be open to the public.

WDNR – Alex mentioned that Linda had approached him and Dave at the Red Cedar River Conference in Menomonie. She again reiterated that she thought the meetings should be open to the public.

The Open Meetings presentation sponsored by the Birchwood School was mentioned at this time. Several people from the Stakeholders Committee including Virginia, Dave, Steve, and Pete Baribeau. Linda also attended.

BCABLA – Mark mentioned that there would be an annual meeting of the BCABLA in June. He was trying to put a schedule of speakers together for the meeting. He expects Dave to be there, but wonders if the DNR or others should be invited to present. Roger Menk (sub for Gerry Johnson) suggested updating the local community on the Watershed TMDL. Alex mentioned Dan Zerr, UW-Extension Basin Educator heading up the Red Cedar River Watershed TMDL. Bill Miller had nothing more to add.

Red Cedar River Watershed/RCLA – Roger had nothing to add, except that there was a RCLA Board Meeting scheduled for April 8th.

Birch and Little Birch Lakes – Steve was looking for input on an idea of his to place a flyer in the mailboxes of residents on Birch and Little Birch lakes. The flyer would clue people into what the committee is doing and share important information like the WDNR Creel Survey. Another committee member suggested this might be a way to bring back members to the Lake Association from Birch and Little Birch lakes that have left because they felt the association no longer was seeing to their needs. The general consensus was that this sounded like a good idea.

C) Alex made the comment that there were several property owners on the north end of Birch Lake who had recently contacted the WDNR about management of nuisance vegetation adjacent to their properties. These property owners wanted the WDNR to provide the permits and complete the plant management. This is not how it works, but shows there others on the lakes who want to see management of aquatic plants done. Birch Lake needs to be included in the new plan. This generated some discussion about buying property on less than desirable lake shore and then expecting others to make changes to it so it is more desirable. That particular bay has always been weedy and full of stumps.

4) Discussions – Dave’s Presentations

Dave started this section of the agenda with his perspective on what the Stakeholders Committee is supposed to be doing. He informed the group that the first three meetings (and this one) essentially were to get everyone on the same page related to the management that has been done, and to what the impacts of this management on Big Chetac and on lakes doing similar management have been. This led to a discussion about the fourth bullet under this section in the Agenda.

Purpose of this Committee – Dave stated that future meetings will be more specifically focused on goals and objectives for the lakes and the management actions decided on by the Committee to help meet these goals. These discussions will determine what is to be included in the revised Management Plan. Under the current scenario, the new plan would be completed in 2017 and ready for implementation beginning with the 2018 open water season.

C) How and when are we as the committee to decide on what goes in the plan? At some point the committee will have to take a position and vote on items following Roberts Rules. These votes should reflect the constituent base each Committee member represents.

Dave asked the group if they wanted to vote on individual items to be included in the plan as they come up, or wait until the final lake plan is done (based on his interpretation of the meeting discussions) and then vote for final acceptance.

C) This is unfair to Dave, the Committee needs to provide more guidance throughout the process. It needs to take a position on things, making it easier for Dave to complete the plan.

C) Another supported this statement. This committee should vote on what is included to give a clear sense of how the new plan is put together.

C) Another agrees, but wonders why that if in the past it was the Lake Association that worked with the WDNR to complete/approve the plan, and that was legal, why anyone who was not a member of the Lake Association should have a say in the process. If anyone can provide input, then what is the purpose of the Lake Association? Does the Stakeholders Committee take the place of the larger Lake Association?

C) Why does someone need to be a member of the Lake Association to have input in a plan that manages a public water? Under the assumption that only the Lake Association and its members have a say, management decisions are crammed down everyone else’s throats.

Dave Response: The Lake Association is the entity the WDNR recognizes as the lead entity. However, public input is required from many more sources than just Lake Association members for the DNR to consider the plan representative of the lake and community at large. All voices need to feel they have a say in what is put in the plan and eventually approved by the Lake Association and the WDNR.

C) Is the committee just making recommendations then, which could be thrown out by the Lake Association in the final approved version?

Answer: No. The Lake Association will accept what this Committee does, but the plan will have to officially be approved by the Lake Association. This Committee should not be the only entity to approve the new plan. It is the thought though, that since this Committee represents the different constituent groups, and that this Committee will approve a plan that is developed based on their work, there is no reason to believe that the Lake Association wouldn't also approve the plan; or that other entities like the Towns and Village would approve the plan, and ultimately that the WDNR would approve the plan.

C) This approach is liked. Get the DNR out of the middle so all they have to do is know that many voices have been heard in the development of the new plan, but in the end that only one voice (the Lake Association) takes the plan to the WDNR.

This Committee provides a forum for different stakeholders to be heard. And is an important contributor in the development of the new plan. Detailed discussions are being held within this group that will help address the general public's voiced concerns and eventually build buy-in. Broader public input will be sought after the more focused discussion in this group.

CLP Management in Other Lakes – Dave and Alex collected data from the following lakes in response to a request by Committee members for more information. A powerpoint presentation accompanied this bullet point.

Rice Lake, Barron County; East Balsam Lake, Polk County; Long Lake, Polk County; and Half Moon Lake in Eau Claire County.

All of these lakes are currently doing small, mid, and/or large-scale management of CLP with herbicides, some on a lake-wide scale. Half Moon Lake has also implemented an alum treatment for water quality improvement. All continue CLP management; and some (Half Moon and Long) have plans for future alum treatments. The alum treatment in Half Moon provided only 4 years of relief at a high financial cost.

Conclusions are similar to what the results have been on Big Chetac Lake: CLP has been significantly reduced but continues to grow; some native plants have been significantly reduced as well, and the verdict is still out on whether or not native plants can and/or will make a complete recovery, or expand their growth. Changes in water quality (good or bad) are also still up for interpretation.

C) None of this data reflects impacts on the fishery.

This observation is true. These lakes are managing CLP for water quality, improving the native plant community, and reducing nuisance navigation issues. None have been overly concerned about possible changes in the fishery.

The cost for management of lakes, particularly when something like alum is considered, is quite high.

Alex commented that there is probably too much sticker shock associated with lake management. He asked how much money it takes to redo a mile of road (approximately \$90,000.00) and we don't even blink.

C) Building a mile of road has known impacts. Lake management actions like alum may have unknown impacts on the fishery.

Water Quality – Dave continued his presentation with several slides related to the current status of water quality in Big Chetac Lake. Big Chetac is considered eutrophic and hyper-eutrophic during the summer. This means there are a lot of nutrients in the system that is being used by algae. Over the last few years there are slight indications that the water quality has gotten better as evidenced by somewhat visible trend lines heading in that direction. However, CLMN data is limited in its scope. There is limited water quality data on Birch and Little Birch. The WDNR Tech Team issued a letter in January 2016 stating that native aquatic vegetation is not likely to recover or increase until water quality increases. Future herbicide treatments in new areas of the lake are not supported by the WDNR until native plants increase significantly in the North Basin (post-treatment). The Tech Team letter supports the alum treatment in the North Basin as proposed by Bill James in his Alum Dosage Report. Modeling suggests that alum will dramatically decrease phosphorus and increase water clarity.

C) Would there be immediate responses to the application of alum?

Alex and Dave: Yes

C) What don't we know about alum?

Alex: More detail is always a plus and could be determined if the decision to pursue an alum treatment were made.

C) Many unknowns. What will happen to the fish in the now clearer water? What happens if an anchor is dragged across the bottom? Does that disrupt the layer formed by the alum application?

Alex: The lake water still may be green after an alum treatment, but the alum treatment should reduce the frequency of toxic algae blooms, and perhaps improve water clarity enough to allow native plants to do better. As proposed in the Bill James Study, alum would reduce the phosphorus concentration to 0.045 mg/l and chlorophyll concentrations to 21 mg/L, Both of these values are still considered eutrophic, but algae blooms would occur only in about 19% of the summer. Over the next couple of years, other nearby lakes will be applying alum and the Chetac group may be able to learn more from others experiences.

Future Water Quality Goals and Objectives – Dave suggested that the next Stakeholders Committee Meeting should be focused on coming up with Goals and Objectives for the different aspects of the lake; specifically fisheries and wildlife, aquatic plants, and water quality.

Alex: This group needs to come up with some consensus as to what they want the lake to look like.

C) There may be different goals for different stakeholder groups. Dave believes this is one reason to have a public meeting sooner than later to get some of these potential other “goals” out in the open.

C) Supports the idea of a public meeting but does not think the committee should report on decisions it has made, simply because none have been made yet.

C) Perhaps participants at the public meeting should be given a few minutes to voice their opinion of the lake, or to answer a specific question posed by the committee.

C) Better to not ask a specific question but rather given them a minute or two to say what their impression of the lake is and what they would like it to be.

There was some speculation on the part of committee members as to what the public wants from the lake based on past years and past reports.

Next Meeting – Dave suggests next meeting start to determine what the goals, objectives, and expectation are for the lake as a basis for moving forward with management planning.

Next meeting proposed for the last week of April.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45pm