

What: Big Chetac and Birch Lakes Association – Public Meeting

When: Saturday, May 20, 2017 10:00am to Noon

Where: Birchwood Schools Commons

Topic: Stakeholder Committee Introduction and Update

Note: Minutes transcribed by Dave Blumer from two digital recordings of the meeting

Minutes

1) Introduction

The meeting was called to order at 10:00am by Dave Blumer, Facilitator (Lake Education and Planning Services, LLC).

Dave first mentioned the Chetek Tornado and how much volunteer effort was still needed to aide in the cleanup.

Dave introduced himself and his business, also indicating that he was working with SEH Inc. back in 2010 when the original Lake Management Plan (2010) was completed and approved by the WDNR and the BCABLA. That he in fact was the one that put the 2010 plan together. But since 2010, he had not been involved in the implementation of that plan until asked in early 2016 by the BCABLA and WDNR to facilitate the construction of the new Plan. Dave stated that LEAPS agreed to take on the project provided it would not be beholden to either the BCABLA or the WDNR. That he could move this project forward as he saw fit.

This project is simply defined as: Preparing a new Lake Management Plan for Big Chetac, Birch, and Little Birch Lakes to be ready for implementation in 2018.

Remaining money in the 2013-15 Lake Management Planning Grant was used to cover consultant costs to facilitate this process. 75% of those costs would be paid for by the grant, the remaining covered by the BCABLA.

2) Slide Presentation (51 slides)

At this point Dave went through a 51 slide presentation (that is now available on the BCABLA webpage at www.bcabla.org).

Slides 2-4 were related to a Summer Interview process started and completed in 2016 whereby Town representatives from Edgewater and Birchwood, and representatives from the Village of Birchwood were interviewed either in person or by phone using a set of questions set up by Dave. In addition, Resort owners on both Birch and Big Chetac lakes were interviewed.

In the end, 2 Town of Birchwood, 3 Town of Edgewater, 3 Village of Birchwood, 2 Resorts on Birch Lake, and 7 Resorts on Big Chetac were included in the interviews.

Slides 5-7 highlighted results from the summer interviews, both summarizing the comments made and the main issues to address that came out of the interviews. These results led to the suggestion that a Lake Planning Stakeholders Committee be formed and that a Lake Management Planning Grant focused on gathering data for Birch and Little Birch Lakes be applied for to support additional planning objectives. It was felt that both Birch and Little Birch lakes were basically ignored during the last 5-year aquatic plant and lake management planning and implementation process. The summer interviews also led to the conclusion that a 3rd Party Facilitator needed to be involved in the process to minimize the appearance that either the BCABLA or WDNR alone (or in concert) were driving the management planning and implementation process.

Slides 8-11 provided more detail about the Stakeholders Committee, identifying who was on it. Representatives on the Stakeholders Committee that were present in the audience were asked to stand up and be recognized. The purpose of the Stakeholders Committee is to guide the development of the new Lake Management Plan through public input directed through the representatives of the different Stakeholder groups on the Committee. These include:

- 2 BCABLA representatives,
- 1 Birch Lake representative,
- 1 representative from the Town of Edgewater,
- 1 representative from the Town of Birchwood,
- 1 representative from the Village of Birchwood,
- 1 representative from a resort on Birch,
- 1 representative from a resort on Big Chetac, and
- 1 representative from the Red Cedar River Watershed Coalition

Committee members from the BCABLA, two Towns, and Village were chosen by the representing body. Resort owners were chosen and invited by Dave based on the summer interviews. The representative from the Red Cedar River Watershed Coalition was chosen and invited by Dave. The Birch Lake representative was chosen based on suggestions from other committee members and invited to be a part by Dave. When making decisions, each representative has one vote.

All decisions/recommendations made by the Stakeholders Committee in regards to the new Lake Management Plan will be abided by the BCABLA.

In addition to the 9 voting members of the Stakeholders Committee, the WDNR is recognized as a non-voting member of the Committee, as is LEAPS as the Facilitator of the Committee.

During this discussion it was asked what a TMDL was, as it was referenced several times in relation to the Red Cedar River Watershed of which Big Chetac Lake is the headwaters. A TMDL is a fancy term for what is basically a plan to reduce phosphorus loading from the entire watershed into the Red Cedar River. These reductions would help make waters downstream be able to meet their expected uses for fishing, recreation, and health.

Slides 12-17 provided more detail about the 2017-19 Lake Management Planning grant that was applied for and awarded to the BCABLA.

Both the formation of the Stakeholders Committee and the application for the lake management planning grant were discussed and approved by those present at the first meeting in the planning process held in December 2016.

Slide 18 provided detail about the official WDNR Ceded Territories Creel Survey to be completed on Big Chetac Lake in 2017.

Slides 19-39 laid out what had been done in each of the Stakeholders Committee meetings from January through April. Stakeholder Committee meetings were not open to the general public in an effort to minimize distraction and provide a comfortable atmosphere for Committee members to share their opinions and concerns without fear of repercussion from outside entities. All agendas, materials used during the various Stakeholder Committee meetings, and minutes of the meetings are available on the BCABLA webpage at www.BCABLA.org

Slides 19-24 - January 2017 Stakeholders Committee meeting focused on past lake management planning and issues of lake use and fishing brought up during the summer interviews.

Slides 25-31 – February 2017 Stakeholders Committee meeting focused on past aquatic plant management planning and implementation.

Slides 32-37 – March 2017 Stakeholders Committee meeting focused on lakes in the region with management plans similar to what has been done on Big Chetac Lake; and discussion of water quality in the three lakes.

Slides 38-39 – April 2017 Stakeholders Committee meeting discussed the make-up of the Stakeholders Committee and whether any changes should be made to it.

3) Goal Setting Activity

At this time, it was about 11:00am, half way through the meeting and Dave introduced the next group activity to take place after a short break. This activity involved attendees at the meeting writing down goals they have for the lakes and then sharing them with the rest. All suggested goals were written down using an easel and note pad.

Slides 40-48 presented a little information about what goals are and what makes them good or bad. During this portion of the discussion Dave indicated that no management action was planned on the lakes in 2017. The possibility of a very limited harvesting project to aide in navigation had been discussed but would likely not be implemented in 2017.

It was further stated that management actions in the new Lake Management Plan would be based on the goals and objectives that come out of this and other discussions and the Stakeholders Committee

discussions. However, no management action would be implemented without public input/involvement beforehand.

Once this part of the slide presentation was done, index cards and pencils were handed out and attendee's given several minutes to write down goals they have for the lakes.

Dave then facilitated an opportunity for attendees to share their goals verbally and allowed each attendee to spend a minute or two explaining their goal and/or what was behind their suggested goal. Every attendee was given at least two chances to share goals they had.

All goals were listed on the large note pad, and then transcribed to a separate document which is available on the BCABLA webpage at www.BCABLA.org

4) Management Alternatives

After about 40 minutes of goal setting, Dave moved on to the last part of his presentation – management alternatives. During this portion of the presentation, it was not Dave's intent to provide exhaustive detail about each of the management alternatives that could be recommended (or not) in the new Lake Management Plan for Big Chetac, Birch, and Little Birch Lakes.

Slides 49 & 50 broke down possible management alternatives into several categories: aquatic plant management, algae management, water quality management, fisheries management, wildlife management, recreational use, and fund raising. In each of these areas, "no management" is as credible a management action as implementing anything else. Along with a brief description of what each possible management action entailed, Dave suggested that implementing it would have an impact – even if "no management" was the action chosen. One possible management action would be the implementation of an Alum treatment to reduce phosphorus build up in the system. It was stated definitively that this management action is only one of many other actions that could be implemented, but that it would not be implemented without a tremendous amount of public input.

5) Monitoring Efforts

It was stated in a WDNR review of management actions implemented from 2013-2015 that each and every management action implemented in the future would need to have a fully developed "monitoring plan". In the last slide of Dave's presentation, examples of possible monitoring programs were introduced. Dave stated that for each management action (even no management) included in the new Lake Management Plan, there would be an accompanying monitoring program. It was hoped and expected that much of the monitoring component in the new plan could be completed by those on the lake with the interests to do so.

At this point the meeting was opened up for questions.

6) Questions and Answers

Q-What % of the lake has Curly-leaf Pondweed (CLP)?

In 2008, Big Chetac had more than 600 acres of dense growth CLP. It was estimated that this level of CLP contributed about 15% of the nutrient load to the lake when it decayed in late June and July.

Q-What is the best way for the constituency to stay informed?

Be involved, search the BCABLA webpage for materials related to this management planning process and past actions taken.

Q-Can we be assured that Birch Lake will be included in the new Lake Management Plan?

Yes

Q-Would it be a good idea to put up additional or better signage at the access points on the lakes?

Yes

Q-Why was it reported that more total phosphorus was going into the Red Cedar Chain of Lakes after the CLP management project started? Why would there be more TP if CLP management was supposed to be reducing it?

Don't know the specific reasons, or even if the data mentioned is accurate. But if it is, it is possible that the rainfall that helped make Big Chetac less green in 2016 by flushing it out, carried more runoff through the system and into the Red Cedar Lakes.

Q-Why are the ducks on Big Chetac non-existent? Are they smarter than us? (indicating that this person felt that herbicide use drove the ducks away)

I don't know how smart ducks are.

Q-Efforts to put more fish habitat in the lakes in the past fell apart due to a lack of follow-through. How can we change that and add more habitat?

A quick discussion of the "Fishsticks" program was had.

Q-What is your definition of "fixing" the lake?

It is not my definition. That definition needs to be determined by those with an interest in the lakes.

Q-What do we as the public need to do to help keep this process moving forward?

Contact the BCABLA and let them know you want the process to move forward. Volunteer to help do this.

Q-How will we know when enough green is gone? Enough CLP is taken out? When the water is clear enough?

Set goals that are reasonable and then monitor for results and impacts of the management actions implemented to reach those goals.

Q-Is CLP in general always bad? Doesn't it have some benefit to the lake?

Yes, some level of CLP can benefit the lakes by providing early season habitat for fish and wildlife. Having some CLP is better than having no plants at all.

Q-There must be some criteria for when aquatic plant management should be done, what is it?

That is one of the things we are trying to determine with the new Lake Management Plan

Q-In the 2008 Plant Survey Report, native aquatic plants provide a high index value for the overall health of the lake. How do we preserve or get back to that?

Most of the high index species were identified in those areas of the lake where tributary water comes in. Other places had native plants, but not an abundance of them. It was anticipated that by reducing competition from CLP that native plants would recover more quickly in the same areas. This has not been the outcome, partially due to the fact the water clarity also limits where native plants can grow.

Q-Why don't we focus on other avenues to improve water quality like shoreland improvements, rain gardens, buffers, etc?

This was mentioned in the 2010 Lake Management Plan, but little has been done to implement projects aimed at making improvements. This is the focus of the Shoreland Habitat Assessment included in the new lake management planning grant currently being implemented.

Q-(a question asked of all the attendees) What keeps Birchwood a viable vacation spot people want to come to? Answer: the fishery (don't forget that in the management planning process)

7) End of Meeting

The Public Meeting was adjourned at about 12:45pm on May 20, 2017. Attendees were asked to leave their index cards if they still had questions or additional goals that they didn't get a chance to say. Attendees were also encouraged to take my card and email me directly if they had additional questions or comments.

An announcement of the BCABLA Annual Meeting was made. Saturday June 10th, 2017 from 8:00am to 10:00am at the Birchwood Village Hall.

Note: To date, I have not received a single email.

Respectfully submitted by Dave Blumer, Lake Education and Planning Services, LLC