

Take Home Notes from the Resort Owner Interviews

The following list of bullet points provides a quick interpretation of the comments made during the interview process involving resorts owners on both Big Chetac and Birch Lakes. This interpretation reflects the comments made in each section of the interview questions and combines similar responses, but does not identify the party 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 the lake, but water sports like tubing and skiing are increasing.
- Every resort owner but one thought that the lake was meeting the lake uses expected of it, particularly in 2016.
- Opinions were mixed as it pertains to the condition of the lakes reducing the number of people who come to the lake.
- Opinions were split about the presence of tension between different lake uses. In all cases, it was felt that if it did exist, it wasn't a big problem because it is a big lake capable of supporting all lake uses without conflict.
- There is a waterskiing ordinance in place on the lake that says waterskiing should only take place between 11:00am and 5:00pm. This ordinance has not been adequately enforced and should be expanded to include other recreational uses.
- Two-thirds of the resort owners felt that CLP management implemented between 2013 and 2015 affected both fishing and recreation equally and in a good way. The other third were not sure or felt not enough management was done to cause any impacts.

Fisheries and Wildlife

- Every resort owner felt that fishing success in 2016 has been really good or outstanding, particularly for crappies, but for other fish as well, maybe less so with northern pike.
- Over the last 25 years fishing has been cyclical. Crappies in a good year in 2016. Bass are doing well, walleyes are increasing due to changes in stocking, northern pike have been declining for some time and are slow in the summer anyway.
- Other factors influence the fishery: El Nino, over-fishing, bag limits.
- Cribs were great, Big Chetac needs more fish habitat/natural structure
- 10 bluegill limit made things better.
- Not really any noticeable changes respondents were willing to blame on the herbicide treatments that began in 2013 although it was the opinion of one respondent that aquatic insects were negatively impacted.
- Very few wildlife concerns related to the treatments that began in 2013, except that duck and geese were down, but this may not be because of the treatments, as populations of ducks have been declining for a long time.

Aquatic Plants and Aquatic Plant Management

- The level of plants in the lake are either just right or too much (in the spring through June), but if too much it is because of the CLP.
- Too many of the wrong weeds in the lake, but good weeds are coming back
- Weeds vary every year, 2016 not an issue
- Property owners and the WDNR were chosen as the ones to determine when aquatic plant growth is a problem, but better a partnership making the decision
- Opinions were mixed on the impacts of management on aquatic plants and the fishery, but opinions were mostly driven by perceived impacts in the parts of the lake they see.
- There was some concern about future management impacts on native plants, the fishery, and possible changes to the entire ecosystem of the lakes, but at least a few believed that educated and responsible people will not let bad things happen.
- Most resort owners interviewed would support either the use of herbicides or harvesting, regardless of their initial preference, if it was shown that one or the other would be effective and cost-efficient.
- Concerns related to harvesting included cost, availability, impacts to spawning areas, and floating plant fragments left over from harvesting.
- Regardless of the management action implemented, re-introduction of native aquatic plants must occur in tandem with management.
- Most would not support the formation of a Lake District without a lot of additional information.

Water Quality and Water Quality Management

- Water quality should be a condition of the lake that supports fishing and recreation. Less thick green water and less smell, fish still like it, the amount of algae present, and whether the water passes tests of conditions were mentioned as indicators of good water quality
- Respondents were split in their concern over water quality, but all felt that the last couple of years have been much better.
- Water quality depends more on environmental conditions than it does management actions
- Needs to be more visually appealing, but will never be clear water
- Not acceptable to only strive for clearer water, must take other concerns into consideration
- Most respondents felt management beginning in 2013 did not improve water quality: too many other variables
- The biggest concern with future management actions is trying to make the lake something it is not.
- Respondents were split on the use of alum to make improvements to water clarity, but most wanted more information: cost, will it work, how long will it last, impacts to the fishery
- Water level needs to be controlled better

Information and Monitoring

- Sources of information mostly come from the Lake Association and then word of mouth
- Most credible information: those in the know WDNR, Scientists, Association, other lake studies
- Least credible: word of mouth, social media, blogs, Facebook, home grown authorities, public surveys
- There needs to be more sources for credible data; need more historical data
- Responses were split regarding truthful and accurate data with the WDNR, Lake Association, and the Towns. Each has an agenda that they are supporting (even the WDNR) which introduces bias and doubt

- Information from individuals is considered full of bias, opinion, and deceit based on whatever the agenda of the person happens to be.
- A better job of getting that information out to the public is needed.
- It's a big lake that needs more monitoring on a variety of parameters, get real numbers and then report them to the public
- Management needs check and balances that monitoring can provide
- Wait two-three years to continue management until more data is collected and more about impacts to the lake is known.

Stakeholder Involvement /Discussion

- Respondents were split when asked if the Association had reached out to, informed, and sought approval for management actions proposed and implemented.
- Most agreed they presented information but felt it was not presented in an unbiased manner. It promoted their agenda, did not seek approval.
- The Assn should vary meeting dates to better accommodate stakeholders, make sure the webpage is complete and up to date, and discuss why options other than herbicides weren't chosen.
- Respondents were unanimous in their feeling that the WDNR did not do enough to reach out to, inform, and seek approval for management actions.
- WDNR should be more visible, provide more definitive answers to questions, show that they are an entity of their own, not just a pawn to the Association. Be held accountable for making sure appropriate public involvement is completed.
- The following stakeholders to involve in management discussion included: Town Boards, Lake Assn (people from all three lakes), WDNR, Property Owners, Downtown Businesses, Resort Owners, Fishing and sporting clubs, Chamber of Commerce, Independent consultants, and anyone who is interested.
- Management discussions should start much earlier in the process, at least in February or March, if not sooner. Several respondents felt that management from 2013-2015 just happened, with very short or no notice to stakeholders.
- Most of the resort owners interviewed would be willing to be involved in the process if asked, but there are some conditions: the meetings can't be free-for-all; there must be some guarantee that things will get done; and a step by step plan to get things done needs to be in place or developed first.