



Meeting Notes Future of Freeborn Lake

Freeborn City Hall on October 15, 2015

6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

The objective of this meeting was to review proposed management strategies for improving water quality, habitats and fish and wildlife-based recreation for Freeborn Lake. A draft plan was made available to attendees and others in September. Some changes had been incorporated into the draft based on feedback received so far. These changes were reviewed. The planning and implementation timelines for permitting; dam replacement; fish barrier construction; and associated lake level and fish management were also reviewed.

Following this advisory group meeting a final draft of the plan will be prepared for agency and full public review and comment. **No additional advisory committee meetings are planned for the remainder of 2015. The next meeting will be a public meeting on the lake plan currently planned for January 2016.** The public review and public hearing are expected to be completed in winter.

Management actions and measurable factors that might trigger implementation of the strategies were reviewed and discussed. The substantive changes are summarized below.

Comments from earlier advisory meetings suggested that work in the lake's watershed can help reduce nutrient contributions to the lake and the plan should better address this topic. Therefore, Action 6 (Local, state and federal agencies and citizen and non-profit groups target implementation of conservation programs and practices in the watershed of Freeborn Lake) was expanded to better integrate with the LeSueur River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies. Additional data from the LeSueur River assessments was also added. The new language is as follows:

Through partnerships, education, outreach and funding mechanisms watershed restoration and protection strategies can be enhanced, while also improving soil health and maintaining productive cropland. Efforts to identify, target and implement projects and practices on private lands to increase ecological benefits associated with clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and sustainable agriculture will be an important long term management strategy.

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The outlet of Freeborn Lake is the Cobb River, which flows northwest and joins the Le Sueur River 3.5-miles south of the City of Mankato. In August 2015, the MPCA finalized the Le Sueur River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies (WRAPS) report summarizing water quality conditions and outlining conservation strategies to meet 10-yr clean water targets. Within this report, watershed-wide strategies have been selected to reduce excessively high flows, sediment, nitrogen, phosphorus, and E.coli concentrations. Conservation practices, including but not limited to: conservation tillage, cover crops, water and sediment control basins, treatment wetlands, restored wetlands, grassed waterways, nutrient management and enhanced city stormwater management, are effective solutions. Freeborn Lake's fish and wildlife resources will benefit most from conservation practices that convey a wide variety of environmental services and incorporate a habitat component.

One component of the WRAPS approach included local outreach and interviews with the county soil and water conservation districts and landowners and residents in the watershed. Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) identified through landowner interviews as being most likely to be implemented within the Freeborn County portion of the Le Sueur River include: water and sediment control basins (WASCOBS), grassed waterways, side inlet, side inlet filter, cover crops and filter strips. Local staff also identified the following priority management areas: lake and stream restoration, wetlands, water retention/infiltration and vegetative buffers. This information has been summarized in the Le Sueur Watershed Priority Management Zone Identification Project completed by the MPCA in 2014.

Building on the scientific guidance above and with technical expertise from the Water Resources Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato, a detailed map has been produced using a hydrologically conditioned digital elevation model and the Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework toolbox provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS). The results offer an inventory of opportunities for placement of conservation practices.

Another change was suggested to better define what is meant by a desired outcome for the fish community. The proposed language is as follows:



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Fish community balanced among trophic levels with a proportional stock density (proportion of stock length fish that are also quality length fish) for perch (stock length = 5 inches, quality length = 8 inches) in the range of 60-80 and a proportional stock density for pike below 30 (stock length = 14 and quality length = 21 inches).

Other changes included minor edits and additional figures to show the lake, depth contours, the lake's catchment (watershed) and the dam. The most recent draft will be posted on Freeborn County's website.

Public comments were received from attendees providing present and historical conditions information and indicating support for the project to move forward. People want to see better water quality and a new dam with some discussion on potential changes in emergent vegetation (i.e., cattail and rushes).

Interested parties are encouraged review the draft and provide comments or other feedback. The next meeting will be a public meeting in January in Freeborn. The date, time and venue to be determined and announced later.

Those interested in the draft Freeborn Lake plan may continue to view or download a copy from the Freeborn County website at <http://www.co.freeborn.mn.us>. If you need a copy mailed to you or wish to provide written comments, please contact Steve Kittelson, Wildlife Lake Specialist, 35365 800TH AVE., MADELIA, MN 56062 or electronically steve.kittelson@state.mn.us.