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Senate bonding committee gets tutorial on lake levels

BY DEBRA NEUTKENS
 REGIONAL EDITOR

WHITE BEAR LAKE — Mostly, the questions involved the logistics of running a 3.8-mile pipeline from Vadnais Lake to White Bear.

Those asking were members of the Senate Capital Investment Committee, who traveled to District 43 Dec. 1 to hear three bonding proposals. The first stop was the VFW, where five senators listened to a short presentation from Friends of White Bear Lake, a local group lobbying for augmentation, followed by a question-and-answer session.

Friends' spokesman Jim Markoe showed the group aerial photos of the lake, pointing out shallow areas, exposed shoreline and the closed

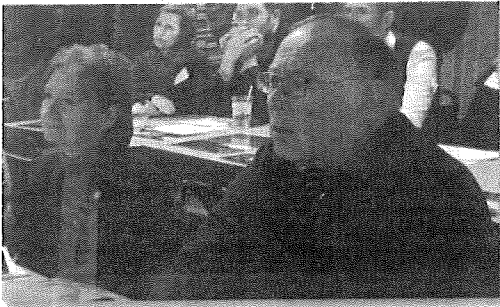
county beach. The Lake Homeowners Association president zeroed in on a canoe launch that now requires "bush-whacking" 150 feet to reach the water and a boat ramp on Commercial Bay that used to have an hour wait. "Now you can launch anytime, if you can get your boat in there," he said.

Markoe told the senators that trees and shrubs are growing where there used to be water.

"We're making new land and permanently changing the size of the lake. It's important to get water back in and reclaim the bottom for the people of Minnesota."

Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (Dist. 1-DFL), committee chairman, asked about the source of supplemental water and how it would be linked. Markoe explained

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SUBMITTED
 Senate Capital Investment Committee members Bev Scalze and Dave Senjem listen to a presentation on augmentation at the VFW by Friends of WBL.

AUGMENTATION: Friends make pitch

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that Vadnais Lake has excess water that's drawn from the Mississippi River through a chain of lakes.

"A railroad and county road lead directly from Vadnais Lake to a corner of Highway 61 and Whitaker Avenue just over there," he noted. "It's a very direct route."

Sen. David Tomassoni (Dist. 6-DFL) wanted to know more about the route and how deep the pipe would be buried. "Are there indications of running the pipeline along the railroad track?" he asked.

"An application for easement was submitted to the railroad three months ago to see if it's even doable," replied Brian McGoldrick, owner of Admiral D's and a member of the lake group. "So it's in the midst of a review process."

As for depth, a pipe would more than likely be 9 feet deep and take water from 18 feet below the surface in Vadnais, McGoldrick said. Filtered water would be dispersed in Commercial Bay a quarter mile from shore.

Markoe pointed out that the county road and railroad run parallel almost the entire way so either option would work.

Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt told the senators that a trench under a county road is "something we have done in the past and we are capable and happy to do this. I have toured the (augmentation) systems in North Oaks and Shoreview and

they work beautifully. This is a bigger issue, but they have a system down and they know how to do it," she said.

"How much is the ask?" inquired Sen. Bev Scalze (Dist. 42-DFL), in whose district the pipeline would originate.

"We're hoping to be in front of you soon with a request," replied Harry Melander, chairman of the Friends board. "We will have some findings next month that will have a realistic expectation on cost."

Scalze also asked how many cities in the area still pump groundwater for municipal use.

All five communities that touch the lake use groundwater, Markoe told the senator. "I don't know any that have switched to surface water, but that is part of a long-term solution. For every gallon of groundwater coming in, 2 gallons go out. We flood the river with groundwater every day."

Sen. Dave Senjem (Dist. 25-R) wondered if it was possible to even get communities to switch to surface water.

"It's possible, but difficult," Melander maintained. "Augmentation provides a means to offset that long-term cost. Eventually communities will take that into consideration. We believe piping water from the lake will provide the first part of infrastructure needed to continue to allow communities around the lake to draw from the aquifer. White Bear Lake will become a reservoir. It's a practical use of taxpayer dollars."

Markoe told the senators that any water that goes into White Bear Lake will either raise the lake level or seep into the aquifer and recharge it. "It's a two-for-one deal," he said. "The lake is a natural recharge point for the aquifer. That has been understood since the '90s."

Scalze noted that other lakes have been dredged in the past and there is an 'ask' for Redwood Lake. "So it's not like we're totally out of the business of engineering lakes to some degree," she said.

"Our lake is in trouble," said Melander, who lives in Mahtomedi. "It won't come back without human help. We're looking for you to consider it in the near future."

The next steps for the committee that night were the school district's administration office and Century College. The district, in conjunction with the city, is requesting \$15 million to build the White Bear Lake Area Community Achievement Center. The center will have programs designed to eliminate the achievement gap by ensuring all students are ready for kindergarten.

Century College leaders are requesting \$5.5 million in bonding funds to design and renovate a portion of their campus to create an engineering and applied technology center.

The Legislature reconvenes at noon Tuesday, March 8.