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Beach reopens at White Bear Lake County Park



PAUL DOLSI / PRESS PUBLICATIONS

Ramsey County lifeguard Mason Krelite started patrolling the shoreline immediately after the beach at White Bear Lake County Park was officially reopened Saturday, June 10. The beach had been closed since 2008 because of the low water level, which has since rebounded enough to create an area near the shoreline suitable for wading. The last MNDNR water level reading for White Bear Lake on June 12 registered 923.53 ft.

LAKE ELEVATION: DNR holds public hearing to air concerns over 922.0 feet

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record of lake levels.

The lake is currently 923.5 feet above sea level. Its long-term average is 923.1 feet and the outlet is 924.3 feet. According to Moeckel, it is above 923 feet 58 percent of the time; 922 feet 73 percent of the time and 921 feet 90 percent of the time. The lake hit its lowest level at 918.4 feet in 2013.

Boats can still be launched at less than 920 feet. Requests for eurasian watermilfoil treatment increase when water level is lower than 921.5 feet.

During the hearing, residents lined up to voice their opinion or ask questions of the DNR.

Lake homeowner Mike Downing wondered if the outlet elevation could be raised to its original 925.5 feet. He also questioned if zebra mussels can reach Bald Eagle Lake if the water level in White Bear Lake, only 8 inches from the top of the outlet, overflows.

The outlet elevation has been adjusted several times, each time due to high water and impacts on property, Naramore said. Before a decision is made to change it, "there are legalities we would need to look into," she added. "We think revisiting the outlet makes sense but we have to be mindful of what raising it would do."

Ekman added that the property belongs to Ramsey County; not the state.

Manitou Island resident Jim Markoe, who is also president of the lake homeowners association, asked why the DNR set a protective elevation without a public hearing?

He admonished the DNR for taking no input from residents on the impact of an unprecedented lake level, noting there are areas of the lake with large trees that weren't there before.

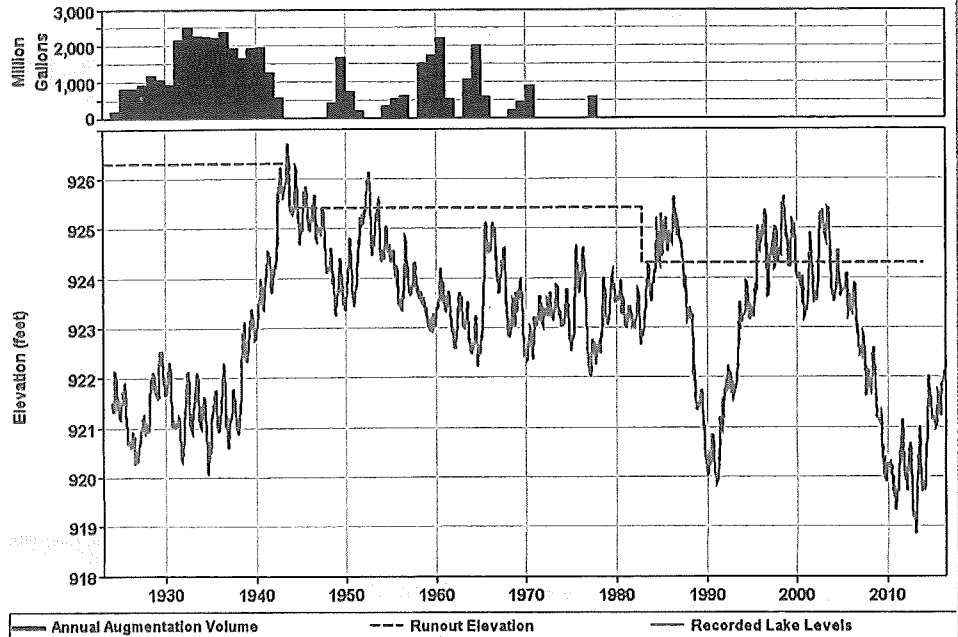
"The ecological harm to the lake is real," Markoe said. He also questioned why the elevation was set so low when the lake is over 923 feet 58 percent of the time.

Perhaps the most scathing remarks came from Dr. Jim Hoffman, a cosmetic surgeon who lives on Lake Avenue. "Have you ever thought you were wrong?" he asked. "I suggest you have an epiphany." Hoffman worries that decomposing biomass along the shoreline (allowed to grow during the low lake elevations) will increase phosphorus levels and change the quality of the lake.

"You have created a mess," he told the DNR representatives.

Restoration Association President Greg McNeely bluntly told the DNR they got it wrong when they set 922 feet. He accused the DNR of doing nothing to help the lake. "We have been trying to figure out what is going on with the lake for five years," he said. "Mato-ska Park has more algae than I've ever seen. You are stalling and it's disheartening," McNeely maintained.

Marina owner Brian McGoldrick told the DNR his boat launch in Commercial Bay is still closed. "Lion's



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The lake was augmented with groundwater from the 1930s to 1978, shown in black shaded areas. The dash line shows elevation of the outlet near Ramsey County beach, which currently is 924.3 feet. The outlet has been adjusted three times.

Park is dead. No one fishes there," he stated. "I think people would be happy with 923.5 feet."

Naramore said the agency is willing to revisit the elevation figure, but will not commit to changing it.

"We will consider input until June 22. If we see things in those comments that we need to revisit the number, we will do that," he said.

Naramore said the agency "carefully considered" the WBLCD recommendation of 924.5 feet, but "reached a different conclusion."

Moeckel pointed out that the recommendation was above the outlet.

"It doesn't work. It doesn't jive with our regulatory responsibilities," he said. "Protective elevation is a point we need to take action, a trigger. Historically, the lake is 924.5 only 15 percent of the time. It doesn't jive to what we know about the lake."

As the DNR attempts to implement the protective level, it will have a variety of discussions with stakeholders, Naramore said. The DNR may consider (appropriation) permit modifications before the level is reached.

Hoffman then criticized the DNR speakers again,

YOU SHOULD KNOW:

The DNR is taking written comments regarding the protective elevation through June 22. Send comments via email to WBLlevel.dnr@state.mn.us or mail to MN DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 5515504025, attention Dan Miller.

calling their actions ignorant and arrogant.

"Why aren't you pushing for sustainability?" he asked. "This is a systemic problem."

The White Bear Lake physician accused the DNR of lacking critical thinking skills that he termed "unbelievable," adding that agency scientists would never excel in the field of medicine.

Naramore took a few moments to compose her response to Hoffman's derogatory comments, saying she brought staff to the meeting in good faith and that his comments went way beyond respectful conversation.

The assistant commissioner then graciously offered to arrange a meeting, private or public, with the upset doctor to calm his concerns.