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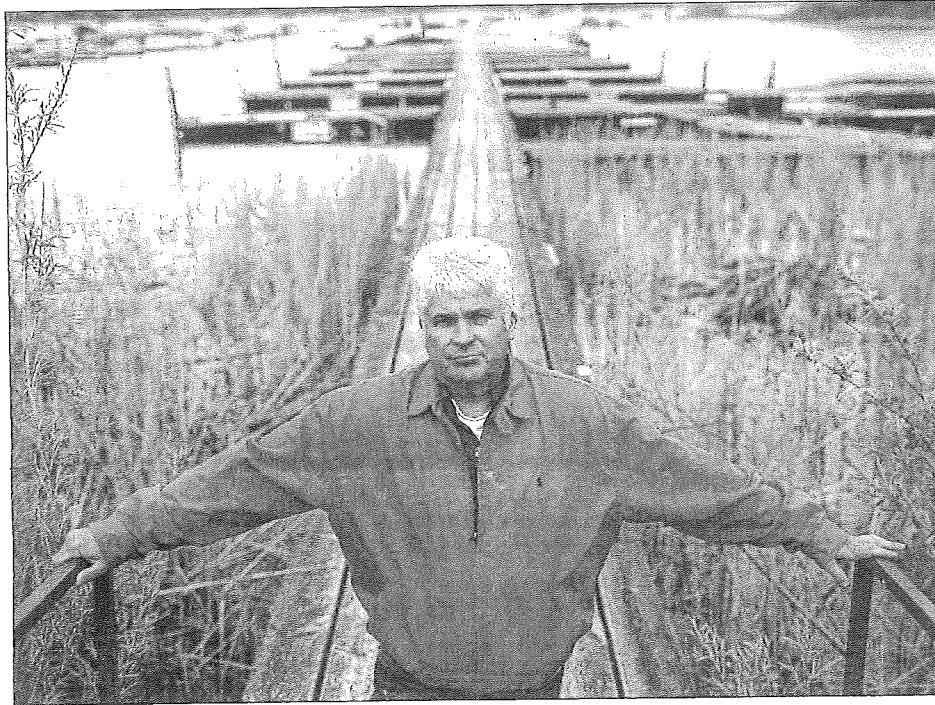
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# MINNESOTA

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JEFF WHEELER • jeff.wheeler@startribune.com

Brian McGoldrick, owner of Admiral D's bar and marina on White Bear Lake, says he's lost a million dollars to low lake levels.

## THE UPS AND DOWNS OF WHITE BEAR LAKE

By DAVID PETERSON • david.a.peterson@startribune.com

In a video posted online two years ago, a business leader complains about the mudhole that is White Bear Lake. Behind him, the visuals scream crisis: Floating docks rest on the muddy bottom, and the twinkle of water comes mostly from scattered puddles.

Fast forward to this weekend, and the change is dramatic. The lake, as iconic in the east metro as Lake Minnetonka in the west, now burbles beneath the same docks. It has risen 3 feet from its low point three years ago.

On the level of rhetoric and politics, though, nothing has changed.

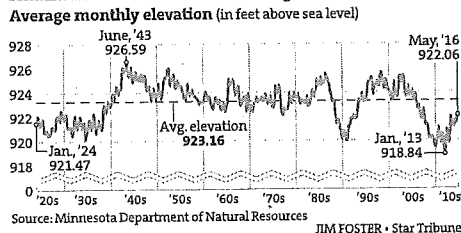
The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources counsels patience, saying droughts always end. But lake-shore owners continue to want water piped into the lake to ensure it remains a popular recreational resource.

Legislators and locals are pushing for millions of dollars, and potentially tens of millions, to study and fix the lake. A lawsuit looms that seeks to force a change.

Brian McGoldrick, who owns a marina on White Bear Lake, says he's lost a million dollars to low lake levels. See **LAKE** on B9 ▶

### WHITE BEAR LAKE'S COMEBACK

White Bear Lake's average monthly lake elevation has risen more than 3 feet since January 2013. But the current level remains more than a foot below average elevation.



“We used to have 2,000 kids at the beach in the summer. Now there’s no one.” Greg McNeely, citizen activist

# LOW WATER MAKES WAVES ON WHITE BEAR LAKE

◀ **LAKE** from BI Bear Lake, is unwilling even to accept the state's lake-level measurements.

"All kinds of data can be manipulated," he fumed. "I've lost a million dollars over this."

The DNR warns against treating White Bear Lake "like a bathtub," injecting water at will to protect boat owners and others regardless of the impact on natural cycles.

Lakeshore owners, knowing they come off to some as purely self-interested, respond that White Bear Lake is a major regional asset that still isn't close to what it was.

"We used to have 2,000 kids at the beach in the summer," said Greg McNeely, a citizen activist. "Now there's no one."

Meanwhile several communities across the east metro watch warily, knowing that they stand accused of causing the problem by sucking water from the aquifer to irrigate the number of lawns multiplied by suburban sprawl.

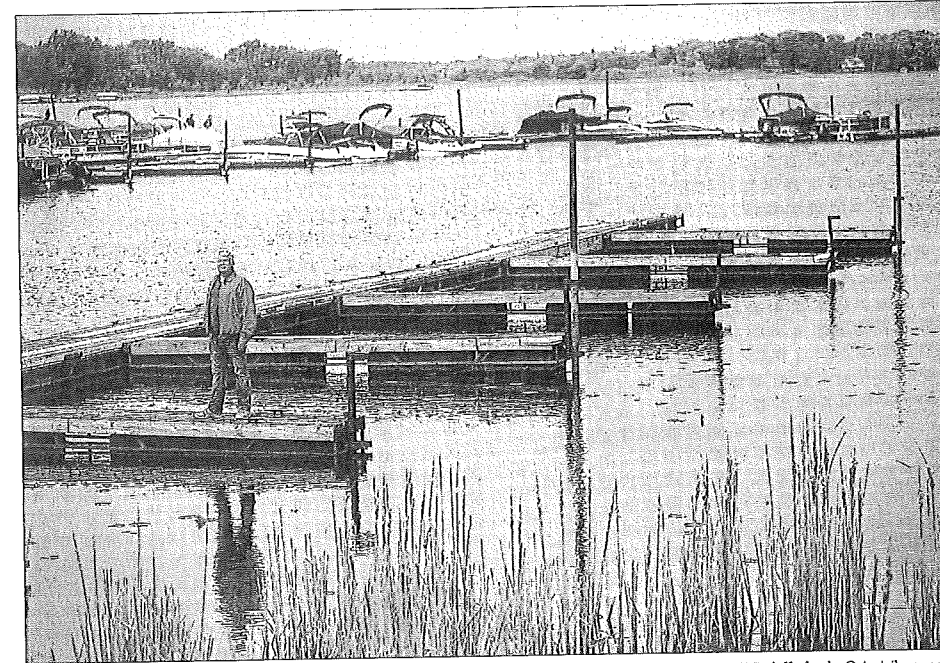
## Weeds and rodents

It's hard to beat McGoldrick's bar and marina, Admiral D's, as a theater of change.

His docks stretch 600 feet into the lake, twice as far as they once did, in order to reach water deep enough for boats. He said his elderly clients must struggle the length of "two football fields with heavy coolers and gas cans. Not fun!"

Close in, the shoreline has been colonized by bulrushes, which he characterizes as a weedy, rodent-infested domain housing what he calls "muskrat hotels."

"These things didn't used to be here at all," McGoldrick said, pointing to one muskrat on his left, another on his right. "Now they're everywhere." He loves it when eagles swoop



JEFF WHEELER • jeff.wheeler@startribune.com

Brian McGoldrick can only rent the boat slips on his docks that are well out into the water on White Bear Lake. He can't rent the slips where he's standing because the water is too shallow.

down from the treetops and grab one for lunch.

To the DNR, the same scene is nature being nature during age-old cycles of rainfall and drought.

"Bulrushes become valuable fish habitat at a moment like this," said Jason Moeckel, of the DNR division watching over lake ecology. "Waterfowl love this. Variations in the lake level are important for plant diversity, which affects the fishery."

McGoldrick isn't immune to the charms of red-winged blackbirds, their vivid shoulder markings flashing in the sun as they hop among the

plants. But he's convinced that White Bear Lake is being neglected as a people place.

"If this were Lake Minnetonka, can you imagine what would be goin' on?" he asked.

In the east, White Bear Lake property owners are considered big wheels who can get on the governor's calendar and already have won funding from the state.

In 2015, a \$100,000 legislative earmark paid to assess the cost of piping water from the Mississippi River. That cost is estimated at potentially \$55 million to \$100 million, figures that advocates acknowledge

will never sell and that they insist are overstated anyway.

In the current session, Sen. Chuck Wiger, DFL-Maplewood, and other lawmakers have been seeking \$1.78 million to find "a sustainable and affordable solution to the White Bear Lake water issues that also enjoys local support."

Ramsey County Commissioner Blake Huffman describes the lake as a regional asset, "one reason people love northeast Ramsey County." As for piping in water from miles away, he said there are "a lot of unanswered questions, like 'Who's paying for it?'"

## Thirsty lawns or lack of rain?

Perhaps the biggest underlying question, now being pursued by the federal government, is whether the spread of suburban subdivisions, leading to more pumping from deep wells, affects lake levels. Or is it mainly just rainfall?

If there's much yet to learn about groundwater interactions, the DNR's Moeckel said that "there's no question when the lake was going down, what you were seeing was a lack of rainfall. The history is 'up in spring, down in summer,' and over time that balances out.

"There were a number of

## 'SUMMER FUN AT WHITE BEAR LAKE'

**What:** The White Bear Lake Area Historical Society will host a look back at decades of summers at the lake, using illustrated stories of the Bald Eagle Water Club, Tally's Dockside, Wildwood Amusement Park and Manitowish Days.

**When:** 6 p.m. Monday

**Where:** Ramsey County Library, 2150 2nd St., White Bear Lake

years, though, with very little 'up,' just the 'down.'"

This month, after plentiful rainfall, the lake has been measured at 922.06 feet above sea level — up from a record low of 918.84 feet in 2013. For advocates of a fix, it was telling that an all-time low was reached so soon after a wave of suburban sprawl.

They assert, moreover, that a fix needn't cost nearly as much as government officials assert. Lake restoration advocates have a professional estimate of \$24 million to \$35 million, with a 20 percent contingency, to pipe water from the Mississippi River, McNeely said — far less than \$55 million.

"The fact it's up a foot from a year ago and looks better is good," he said, "but we've had record rainfall — some wet years. Other lakes around us are all full."

At the marina, McGoldrick grows impatient with all the studies proposed and completed, and awaits a courtroom showdown in 2017 at which restoration advocates plan to confront the DNR and others.

"We have a court date March 6," he said. "That's how this thing's gonna wind up."

David Peterson • 651-925-5039