

He Got an Earful...

Nov. 15, 2012

It was likely no surprise to Department of Natural Resources secretary John Griffin when he got an earful of criticism yesterday following his second annual "state-of-the-lake" (Deep Creek) presentation to over 100 people gathered at the parish hall of St. Peter's Church in Oakland. Most of those who made comments were frustrated, disgruntled, discouraged lakefront property owners who for the past several years now have watched their little pieces of heaven become ravaged by invasive plant life, the erosion of their shoreline, the presence of Canada geese and their droppings, the filling of their waterfront with sediment, and low water levels, particularly in the cove areas.

In fairness to Secretary Griffin, the presentation by him and his various staff persons, as hoped, did contain some proposed, specific actions to address some of these problems, particularly the invasive plant life and, to a certain extent, the sediment problems. Government is famous for spending an inordinate amount of time doing studies and testing, with real action seemingly taking forever, and that description seems to fit in this case, at least for those property owners most negatively affected. Final results of the sediment testing will be "in" sometime around February, which will help determine the first step in attacking that problem, and a plan to use a herbicide on the unwanted Eurasian watermilfoil seems to be in place and tentatively scheduled for next summer, although no one – including the secretary – seems to know where the money is going to come from to pay for it. Dealing with the unwanted geese is apparently still in limbo, or at least nothing was said yesterday about how to handle that problem. The water level problem is dependent so much on weather conditions, which nobody can control, and is made more complicated by the scheduled releases into the Youghiogheny River for both fishery and whitewater rafting interests.

The lake issues are so multifaceted and complicated, there is no question that a cooperative approach by a number of entities and interest groups will be crucial in addressing them, something else suggested by Griffin and by some others who spoke. There is also a wide degree of opinion on just how serious the aforementioned problems are at the lake, obviously depending upon where one's property is located. Many who reside on the main body of the lake (deep-water shoreline areas), and thus not directly affected by the shallow water problems, are not overly concerned right now.

The fact that this writer keeps coming back to, however, is that *the state owns the lake and the state owns the buffer strip*. Yet, an owner wanting to protect the shoreline in front of his/her property – even though that piece of ground is *owned by the state* – must not only pay hundreds

of dollars for *permission* (permits) to try to stop the erosion, but must also bear the full cost of the project. Meanwhile, the state seems to be doing little or nothing to protect – to *manage* – the buffer strip.

Further, some property owners now have buffer-strip trees down as a result of the recent storm, trees that are impacting their docks – trees that are *owned by the state* – and yet these owners even have to bear the expense of having them removed! This is incredible, and just plain wrong.

Undoubtedly, there is much more to come on this issue.