

DNR Water Quality Group Continues Discussion On "State-Of-Lake" Mtg.

Nov. 22, 2012

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources Water Quality Working Group convened last Thursday morning, with much of the discussion centering on the "state-of-the-lake" presentation/public meeting that was held by DNR Secretary John Griffin the previous evening at St. Peter's parish hall in Oakland.

John Wilson, DNR assistant director and chair of this research-oriented group, shared his frustration about some of the comments that were made by lake property owners at Wednesday's gathering, which drew over 100 people.

Wilson said that he has worked with DNR for 27 years, and believes that DNR staff people are "dedicated and doing their jobs" because they "want to leave the planet better off." He said that the "verbal abuse was both unwarranted and unfair," and that Secretary Griffin was simply trying to communicate the current conditions of the lake.

Ellen Williams, a second-generation lake stakeholder, responded to Wilson's comments, stating that there were no personal attacks made or intended. She agreed that there was a "large chasm in communication."

Barbara Beelar of Friends of Deep Creek Lake also agreed that there is a major gap in communications, which she says her organization has been trying to address for four years. To that end, the Friends arranged for an audio recording of both last Wednesday's meeting as well as the water quality group meeting. Beelar restated the request made by Brian Greenberg, urging Secretary Griffin to develop channels of communications beyond the narrow research reporting.

DNR Resource Assessment Services head Bruce Michael volunteered his view that he could appreciate the community frustration and wishes for progress on a quicker time frame.

The Water Quality Working Group consists of various state and local agency staff involved in research and water monitoring, and meets semi-annually – in the spring to review upcoming research, and in the fall to present study findings. Meeting attendance is voluntary.

Attending last Thursday's meeting were four representatives from the DNR, Annapolis, three county staff persons, two local DNR staff persons, and a couple of participants from community groups.

Eric Null of Deep Creek Lake management presented a report on the first year of the benthic mats pilot. These mats are used to prevent growth of intrusive aquatic grasses around docks. Six mats were installed in 2012, but several had problems. People have been calling the lake management office for information about installation for 2013.

Null said that the office is also working on a storm-water problem with a local homeowners association. He announced the removal of the stationary water monitoring station at Poland Run, meaning that only one tributary – Cherry Creek – is currently being monitored.

Bruce Ortt of DNR Maryland Geological Survey gave an in-depth progress report on the work on Phase II of the Deep Creek Lake sediment study. The lab is currently studying the 42 cores of sediment which were taken from around the lake. Ortt said that these cores will provide MGS with information on when sediment was deposited, which will be critically important data for developing plans for sediment retention proposals for tributaries and shorelines.

Ortt said that sampling analysis indicates that lake sediments are currently pollutant-free. Of particular concern was mercury, since Deep Creek Lake is listed as impaired by mercury contamination, and fish consumption advisories exist.

But the mercury that appears in fish flesh is not present in sediments, which Ortt said is good news because the sediment which eventually will be removed will not require special handling, substantially reducing removal costs.

The next step of the Phase II study is the development of best-practices manuals, one for property owners and the other for local and state officials. The request for proposals will be going out early next year and reports projected to be forthcoming by the end of 2013. In the interim, MGS is extending its work with possible additional trips for cores and additional focus on storm-water runoff.

Ortt said that, at this point, he and other technical people cannot say whether how much sediment is coming from the tributaries and how much from shoreline erosion, nor do they know the rate and depth of accumulation.

Ortt did make a request to the general public.

"We are very interested in finding any historical maps which show the depths at Deep Creek Lake, such as old fishing maps, he said, inviting anyone having such a map to contact him at rortt@dnr.state.md.us.

The fourth annual water monitoring report was presented by DNR's Sherm Garrison, who acknowledged that there has been no change in the sampling sites and protocol during 2012.

"What we are seeing is that 98% of the lake is good," he said. "The other is experiencing some submerged aquatic vegetation and algal blooms. Since the lake is a natural system, you will see algal blooms."

DNR scientists report that they need as much data as can be collected, so it is unclear how many more years DNR plans to continue sampling in the same sites around the lake and whether sampling locations will be changed.

Ellen Williams volunteered there is a problem of communications about this work.

"What DNR labels as a cove is not what we at the lake refer to as a cove," she said, adding that an example of this disparity is the cove designation for Deep Creek Cove, which is in the channel between Pergin Farms and Crescent Shore, and not up the actual Deep Creek Cove.

The 2010 study conducted by UMD/Center for Environmental Sciences EcoCheck concluded there was insufficient water quality data being collected to make an overall assessment of the lake or watershed. These independent scientists urged diversification of collection points in the lake to collect data on the "near shore" zone – the shoreline out 100 feet – the coves, and the headwater areas of the coves, which are transition areas between the tributaries and the lake. According to Beelar, data currently collected by DNR reflects only water-quality conditions in the middle of the lake. She said a summary of the study can be found on the Friends' web site at friendsofdcl.org.

Bruce Michael, director of Resource Assessment Services for the DNR, reported on the third year of the submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) study and the Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) survey conducted in early July.

For the SAV study, DNR has been looking at six specific sites and observing the SAV populations over time. Researchers report that they have found the lake has a "healthy SAV population," and that the agency intends to continue the SAV study in 2013.

The EWM survey found 5-6% of the section of the lake in 18 feet or shallower water to be impacted by this invasive plant.

Michael reported that this is not a "problem" because this plant has not crowded out other SAVs, according to the SAV study, in the six sites in the lake.

DNR staff have considered various control options, finding every one with potential negative impacts. Other DNR scientists have prevented use of the Eurasian weevil because they report it is not native to Maryland, is costly, and is a favorite food of sunfish, which has a large population in the lake.

DNR is considering two pilot control projects in the 2013 season. One may be a sample application of the herbicide 2-4 D. The other option is a mechanized harvester.

Among the downsides of the harvester is that it might import other invasive species into the lake, and then the EWM might be transported by such a machine from the lake to the Chesapeake Bay. Also, the actual harvesting has to be done carefully because cutting may inadvertently enable further distribution of this invasive plant to other areas of the lake.

Michael announced that DNR will be conducting another Eurasian watermilfoil survey in June 2013. Beelar urged the DNR to conduct the study at the height of the emergency of this plant, which is late July and August.

A report on lake fisheries ended the meeting on a positive note. After a 2010 fish kill of about 10,000, fish populations have rebounded well, especially game fish like walleye, northern pike, and yellow perch.

The next meeting of the Water Quality Working Group will be held sometime in the spring of 2013.

Audios of the Water Quality Working Group meeting as well as the state-of-the-lake presentation are now available on the Friends of Deep Creek Lake web site (friendsofdcl.org).