

DNR to rule on lake level

By STAN MILAM

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Photo



Photo by [Bill Olmsted](#)

Water trickles over the spillway of the dam from Geneva Lake into the White River in Lake Geneva on Tuesday.

LAKE GENEVA — What takes top priority: anglers' concerns over adequate flow and healthy fish in the White River or an adequate water level in Geneva Lake to support recreation and the local economy?

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources plans to determine the issue Nov. 7. That's when a trio of DNR biologists will submit a study of fish habitats along with river and lake levels. The biologists will make recommendations the department expects to adopt, said Michelle Hase, the DNR engineer in charge of the matter.

"We received a complaint in July that the river was drying up and it was resulting in fish kill," Hase said. "Based on a similar complaint in 1977 and another one in 1994, a flow of two cubic feet per second in the river was determined. That's what we asked the Geneva Lake Level Corporation to provide."

Larry Larkin, a spokesman for the corporation, alerted affected lakeshore municipalities by letter of the situation. The issue is far from clear-cut regarding the effect the lake has on the river, said Larkin, the corporation treasurer and a past president.

"We want to know how flow is determined and where it's determined," Larkin said. "The first 200 to 300 feet of the river from the spillway has historically dried up in August. And there are underground water sources for the river that need to be considered."

Facing a penalty of \$1,000 a day, the corporation opened up the dam on the lake's eastern shore to comply with the DNR order. The result has significantly lowered water level of the Geneva Lake.

The water level on the western shore of the lake went down 18 inches, said Kevin Kirkland, owner of Lake Geneva Marine of Fontana.

"It is now down 14 inches from the normal level," Kirkland said Wednesday afternoon. "The recent rains have

raised it a bit from the level of 18 inches below normal, but it's still down a lot."

In the short run, the low lake level has caused problem for residents putting their boats away for the winter.

"We've had to go out with a crane and lift the boats off," Kirkland said. "We have to hook on to the back of the boat and lift it into the water. There's not enough water near the piers to simply lower the boats into the water so they can be moved to the marina."

Beyond the inconvenience and added expense to store the boats, the lower lake level could cause damage to pier cribs.

The cribs are concrete moorings used to anchor the pier posts. If the water level lowers to the depth of the cribs, ice could damage the cribs. The damage could cost homeowners along the lake thousands of dollars.

"I have received one email complaint regarding the cribs," Hase said. "That's something we will look at as well as securing the boats off the piers for storage."

DNR stream biologist Rachel Fabre will be sampling the river, while fish biologist Doug Welch will look at the fish habitat. Heidi Bunk, a lake biologist for the DNR, will study the effects of opening the dam on Geneva Lake.

"The three biologists will prepare one report with recommendations," Hase said. "I expect to adopt those recommendation and put them into an order."

The corporation has hired Madison lawyer William O'Connor and hydrology experts Montgomery & Associates to advise the corporation during talks with the DNR. The corporation has asked each of the four affected municipalities—Lake Geneva, Linn, Fontana and Williams Bay—to include \$2,500 in their 2013 budgets to pay for the expenses incurred as a result of the DNR orders.

State Sen. Neal Kedzie, R-Elkhorn, and Assembly Rep. Tyler August, R-Lake Geneva, have toured the area.

"I am deeply concerned about low lake levels," August said. "I know that Sen. Kedzie is also concerned. He has taken the lead on this, and I expect he will contact the DNR to make sure that economic as well as natural resources interests are protected."

While the DNR might disagree on specifics of the issue, both sides want to get the matter decided and move on, Hase said.

"We all want a resolution, and we have all agreed to resolve the matter as soon as possible," Hase said. "We are aware of concerns of the corporation and property owners. Any resolution will take into account those concerns in addition to the concerns of those who have complained about inadequate levels in the river and concerns about the fish."

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