

The process for moving forward on Medicine Lake issues

By Brian Rosemeyer

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Guest Columnist

The Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission is a regional government organization with a vision of “stewardship of water resources to protect and enhance our communities.”

The Commission works to improve water quality and protect against flood damage in the watershed, which includes all or parts of nine cities that drain to Bassett Creek (Plymouth, Medicine Lake, Minnetonka, Golden Valley, St. Louis Park, New Hope, Crystal, Robbinsdale and Minneapolis).

The Commission has a long history of successfully working with these cities on projects that improve the quality of lakes, streams and wetlands while also reducing flooding.

In recent years, the Commission has responded to requests from the City of Medicine Lake and the Association of Medicine Lake Area Citizens to study water levels and consider making alterations to the dam on Medicine Lake so summer water levels could be higher – visit bassettcreekwmo.org for a history of the Commission's involvement in the issue, information the Commission has provided on water levels, and a recently compiled list of stakeholder-identified issues facing Medicine Lake.

In November, the Commission laid out the steps it will take to continue facilitating a discussion among stakeholders and learning more about Medicine Lake issues and the entities that may take the lead on addressing the issues.

A letter sent Dec. 3, 2013, to stakeholder groups including the association, City of Medicine Lake, Hennepin County, City of Plymouth, and Three Rivers Park District. A meeting of stakeholders is 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 4, at Plymouth City Hall – 3400 Plymouth Boulevard.

Dear Medicine Lake Stakeholder:

As you know, the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission (Commission) has been working to understand and respond to concerns from groups and residents regarding late season low water levels on Medicine Lake for several years.

Through recent correspondence and meetings with various stakeholders like you, the Commission has determined that multiple issues exist within the lake that may affect various aspects of the lake and its uses including recreation, water quality, swimming, boating, fishing and aesthetics.

The Commission is committed to continuing to understand the issues within the lake and the Commission will continue to play a role in facilitating information gathering and dissemination.

However, the Commission also asks stakeholders to understand that the Commission may not ultimately be the implementer or funder of potential future projects, particularly those with the primary purpose of improving recreation. The Commission's primary goals include improving water quality and addressing flooding concerns within the watershed.

At their meeting on November 20, 2013 the Commission approved these actions as a way to progress in its role as facilitator:

- 1. Continue to gather information from all stakeholders on the issues within the lake, where they are occurring, what uses are being impacted and how each stakeholder prioritizes the issues.*
- 2. Direct Commission Engineer to develop a list of components needed to study raising water levels and a ballpark figure for completing such a study in order to inform the issue.*
- 3. Host a large meeting or summit of all stakeholders early in 2014 (facilitated by a third party) in order to:*
 - a. Share information and ideas*
 - b. Dispel miscommunication*
 - c. Hear from experts to learn more about various issues and how they could be addressed*
 - i. TRPD – swimming, swimmers itch, boat launches, vegetation*
 - ii. Barr – components of a study to raise the dam*
 - iii. Minnehaha Creek Watershed District – variable weir on Lakes Minnetonka and Nokomis*
 - iv. TBD – lake dredging*
 - d. Decide together on the next possible steps*

The Commission looks forward to cooperating with you on these actions.

Laura Jester is the Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission Administrator.