

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE
COMFORT LAKE–FOREST LAKE
WATERSHED DISTRICT
Tuesday, April 14, 2020**

1. Call to Order

President Spence called the April 14, 2020 special board meeting to order at 3:12 p.m. via online teleconference.

Present: President Jon Spence, Vice President Jackie Anderson, Treasurer Steve Schmaltz.

Absent: Secretary Jen Oknich, Assistant Treasurer Jim Dibble

Others: Mike Kinney, Emily Heinz, Blayne Eineichner (CLFLWD staff); Meghan Funke (Emmons & Olivier Resources); Rebecca Oldenburg Giebel (Washington Conservation District); Eric Alms (MN Pollution Control Agency).

2. Watershed Management Plan Update – Lakes, Streams, Wetlands

Attendees introduced themselves and Dr. Meghan Funke facilitated discussion of lakes, streams and wetlands.

Lakes

The first goal discussed was “adaptively manage District lakes to protect and improve water quality and recreational utility as appropriate to each lake.” Dr. Funke reviewed the District’s progress toward lake water quality goals including phosphorus concentration, Secchi depth, and lake grade. She reviewed which lakes are impaired vs unimpaired for nutrients/eutrophication. Manager Anderson pointed out the “recreational utility as appropriate to each lake” portion of the goal. There was discussion about lake associations and cities being partners in managing recreational utility of lakes, such as management of aquatic invasive species (AIS) and operation of the Forest Lake plant harvester. There is a desire to see pathways from public boat launches out to open water maintained free of aquatic vegetation so boats can easily pass through. Manager Schmaltz recommended using the 150-foot distance from shoreline as a benchmark for where and where not to treat AIS on District lakes. Manager Anderson suggested this benchmark is not appropriate for all lakes, for example Comfort Lake, and the District should set different goals and priorities for each lake management district. There was discussion of biological communities as a metric for lakes, including fish surveys, index of biological integrity (IBI), and plant biomass. Chloride is another issue to consider as it is tied closely to the amount of impervious surface in the watershed. Eric Alms indicated according to MN Pollution Control Agency’s (MPCA) perspective, chloride is not a top issue for CLFLWD right now, but we need to make sure it doesn’t become one in the future. Some target areas where

roadways are near lakes include Highway 8 between Comfort Lake and Little Comfort Lake, Highway 97 near Lake Keewahstin, and Lofton Avenue near Bone Lake.

There was discussion about the District's goal to "preserve existing shoreland buffers and encourage the establishment of new buffers and lakescaping for water quality and habitat benefits." Manager Anderson stressed that natural buffers with deep rooted vegetation, not simply landscaped flower beds, should be preserved and created. She also supported a cost-share program to promote native emergent vegetation in the nearshore area to help prevent ice ridge issues, which are especially common on Forest Lake. There was discussion about the District's regulatory oversight in the shoreland area, and how the District should coordinate with local municipalities that have shoreland and/or tree ordinances. While two objectives in the plan focus on preserving and creating buffers through the cost-share program and regulatory means, education and outreach is a big component of shoreline buffers as well. The District may showcase some buffers/shoreline restorations on its annual watershed tour. Rebecca Oldenburg Giebel explained that homeowners do not want shoreline buffers to look "weedy." Changing the public perception of what looks nice would help create and protect full, natural shoreline buffers. Ms. Oldenburg Giebel suggested using maintenance as a talking point: native buffers require less maintenance than a turfgrass lawn that needs to be regularly mowed, aerated etc. One buffer metric is length of buffers present, represented as a percentage of a lake's total shoreline length or average percentage of each individual property's shoreline length. Width (from shoreline measured toward the upland) and quality of buffer vegetation (closely spaced plants, native plants rather than nonnative like reed canary grass) should be considered as well. Crossover with the District's Education and Outreach program is necessary in order to reach out to residents and gather more information to target shoreline buffer implementation. The District has several photo inventories of lake shoreland buffers on its major lakes but needs to keep them updated and expand to smaller lakes.

Streams

Some stream impairments include high chloride concentrations in some parts of the Sunrise River and biological indicators, e. coli and dissolved oxygen in the Bone-Birch-School-Little Comfort (BBSLC) tributary stream. The District's stream goals could be further refined to look at removing stream reaches from the impaired waters list and preventing unimpaired reaches from being put on the list. There was discussion about why to protect and improve streams. Who uses streams? What are the benefits to the watershed achieved by improving streams? Understanding a natural stream versus man-made conveyances is important. Manager Anderson indicated there are several private, unregulated ditches, in the Comfort Lake management district that are contributing flows and nutrient loads to Comfort Lake. She noted that MN Department of Natural Resources has an inventory that differentiates between public waters and private waters. Stream buffers were discussed as being as important as lake buffers. Areas for restoration may be targeted via desktop analysis paired with ground truthing. A full inventory is needed in each lake management district.

Wetlands

Wetland protection and restoration can have multiple benefits including downstream water quality improvements (potentially a Tier 1 priority), water storage (potentially a Tier 2 priority), and habitat corridors (potentially a Tier 3 priority). There are different priorities and tools for different habitat benefits. All these factors are interrelated, so many projects will have multiple benefits across various priority tiers. Additional inventory work is necessary to target key wetland areas for the various benefits. There was discussion about interagency coordination to protect wetlands, such as with the Wetland Conservation Act. Wetland banking can be an important tool in restoring wetlands: restoring/creating wetland acres so that whenever wetland impacts occur within the District, the District can direct developers to sequencing requirements with purchasing wetland bank credits as a last resort. Wetland boundaries may be delineated/inventoried ahead of development in order to be proactive on protection measures. Additionally, wetland water levels may be tracked. The District already completed a drained wetland inventory, but it was a desktop analysis, so some details are missing. Additional inventory work would be helpful in targeting key corridors etc.

3. Adjourn

- a) Plan Update Workshop #2 – April 16, 2020**
- b) Next regular board meeting – April 23, 2020**

Manager Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Manager Schmaltz. Upon a roll call vote, the motion carried 4-0, and the meeting was adjourned at 5:07 p.m.

Jen Oknich, Secretary _____