

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
COMFORT LAKE–FOREST LAKE
WATERSHED DISTRICT
Tuesday, November 10, 2020**

1. Call to Order

President Spence called the November 10, 2020 special board meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. via online video conference.

Present: President Jon Spence, Vice President Jackie Anderson, Treasurer Steve Schmaltz, Assistant Treasurer Jim Dibble

Absent: Secretary Jen Oknich

Others: Mike Kinney, Emily Heinz, Garrett Miller, Abigail Ernst (CLFLWD staff); Meghan Funke (Emmons & Olivier Resources); Doug Joens (Forest Lake Lake Association); Steve McComas (Blue Water Science)

2. Public Open Forum

There were no comments.

3. Watershed Management Plan Update

It was noted that Forest Lake Lake Association Member, Doug Thomas, Blue Water Science owner, Steve McComas, and Watershed Assistant Miller were in attendance to participate in the discussion about aquatic invasive species (AIS). Watershed Technician Heinz provided an overview of AIS as it relates to ecological integrity in District lakes.

Manager Anderson stated that each lake has unique characteristics and as such should have unique standards for ecological integrity. She indicated the paleolimnological deep sediment cores should inform decisions such as this. Manager Schmaltz suggested the District collect historic permit information from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to inform management decisions. He asked if there is scientific data to support whether Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) crowds out and replaces native aquatic plants if left untreated. Mr. McComas said this has been an issue of investigation over the last few decades. He explained there was one study that found native plants displaced by EWM initially. However, when researchers re-surveyed 3-4 years later, they found the native plants had grown back. Mr. McComas indicated that in the long-term EWM tends to reach a growth equilibrium and the native plants re-grow from their seedbank. He noted nitrogen is a main driver of EWM growth.

Administrator Kinney suggested reviewing historical photos to estimate what the natural vegetated state of each lake looked like many years ago. He explained there are interesting

photos from about a hundred years ago showing a significant amount of emergent vegetation on Forest Lake that is visible from the shoreline photo. Mr. McComas suggested contacting the DNR to get hold of historical fish surveys from as early as the 1920's which include aquatic plant observations. Those historical findings could be compared to modern day surveys.

Manager Dibble indicated the curly-leaf pondweed (CLP) growth in Forest Lake seems to worsen each year and asked what the cause might be. Mr. McComas explained the main driver is most likely milder winters and more growth occurring earlier in the year with earlier ice out dates. A cold severe winter would generally result in lower CLP growth the following spring/summer. Manager Dibble asked if it would be helpful to try eradicating CLP in neighboring ponds. Mr. McComas indicated that would be a very tough task because CLP can grow back from turions and/or seeds. It is not feasible to eliminate either one of those components at this time. Seeds are resistant to herbicide treatments. President Spence noted CLP has been declining in Comfort Lake in recent years. There was a hand pulling effort years ago which may have had an impact. Lake sediment composition may have an impact as well.

Manager Anderson referred to research by the MN Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) finding that EWM adapts to each lake after introduction. As such, EWM treatment methods must be tailored to each individual lake. She suggested the next 10-year plan include a more focused treatment approach to EWM. She suggested working with MAISRC to sequence each lake's EWM genome and advise about management strategies.

President Spence explained the District is able to treat AIS within 150 feet of the shoreline, but it must go through a specific regulatory process to do so. The way the District treats AIS may differ from how a shoreline homeowner would treat AIS. For example, while the District will engage in targeted control (through an *Invasive Aquatic Plant Management Permit*), many shoreline homeowners may desire widespread plant management (which would be done through a different permit – *Aquatic Plant Management Permit*). President Spence suggested the District aim to get its lakes as close as possible to pre-settlement conditions. He noted the District will need to gather historic information to understand what this looks like for each lake.

Manager Schmaltz noted increasing lake water quality and clarity will result in increased aquatic plant growth. Ms. Heinz noted this relates to the comparison with Lake Keewahtin – high water quality means a lot of native plant growth. A high quality lake does not look like a swimming pool. Manager Anderson indicated every lake will have different plants and look different. She suggested the District educate shoreline residents, so they understand what type of lake they live on. She indicated this should also apply to the people in charge zoning and shoreland regulations, such as city staff.

Doug Joens asked if full lake EWM treatments would be more economical than targeting treatments in areas of known EWM growth. Mr. McComas advised a whole-lake treatment would become economical if EWM is covering 30-50% of the lake or more. If coverage is closer to 10%, spot treatments are more economical.

Mr. Miller suggested the Board consider what is realistic to achieve when thinking about what it wants the lakes to look like. He explained AIS eradication is not feasible. Manager Anderson suggested a realistic goal is to get any AIS to the point that CLP is in Comfort Lake, which is barely noticeable. Mr. McComas noted Comfort Lake is one of few lakes where CLP has declined and stayed down. He suspected this is due to the sediment composition.

Manager Anderson stated it is important to consider climate change impacts on AIS. She suggested the District start documenting how that change in climate is impacting AIS and other aspects of District responsibilities.

There was discussion about the AIS Program 10-year estimated expense budget. Managers Spence and Anderson agreed they would not foresee any cuts to this budget. Manager Dibble indicated he thought the public would be in favor of more spending on AIS considering how visible it is. He suggested prioritizing AIS prevention and early detection/rapid response. Mr. Miller noted District watercraft inspectors perform early detection lake access surveys during each shift, and the District has an AIS rapid response plan. Manager Schmaltz indicated partnerships are important, especially for obtaining grants.

Manager Schmaltz recommended the District refrain from treating EWM in the next ten years. Manager Anderson suggested the District budget for providing technical expertise to lakeshore residents and possibly consider making a grant program available for homeowners to treat AIS.

There was discussion about the Administration and Programs budgets.

- Budget dollars were added for the new District office space.
- The monitoring budget includes diagnostic monitoring, long-term legacy monitoring, and project effectiveness monitoring. Monitoring is important for identifying projects. The District is incorporating new technology as well as staff and volunteer resources to reduce the price of monitoring.
- The Standard Project Signage initiative may go beyond creating signage for District projects and may include other initiatives such as signage at District boundaries. This will go hand and hand with the District logo redesign. Manager Anderson stated the District needs to work with design experts on this initiative.
- The District is working toward creating a permitting database.
- Manager Anderson stated the District needs to pursue grants for any major land acquisition. The managers requested a presentation about the reverse auction format at a future meeting.
- There was discussion about the Permitting Program and whether 1.8 FTE is enough staffing. Ms. Heinz indicated she would check with Houston Engineering to see whether the workload analysis factored projected community growth into its FTE estimates.

There was discussion about Projects.

- Volume reduction projects will reduce sediment loads for Comfort Lake and Little Comfort Lake. Stream projects under the 5300 section will reduce sediment loads as well.
- The 5200 Lakes section contains the projects needed to achieve lake water quality goals (i.e., phosphorus concentration, Secchi depth).
- There was discussion about the District's history of underspending its budget. Mr. Kinney suggested measuring progress by outcomes achieved (i.e., phosphorus reductions achieved, improvements in water clarity) rather than by dollars spent. He explained staff tries to spend public dollars wisely and be as cost efficient as possible. He explained project development takes time to work with landowners, execute agreements, etc.
- Manager Anderson explained she is working on a matrix to help prioritize projects for other pollutants such as sediment.
- Manager Schmaltz asked why the Volume Control Facility project would be an annual cost. Dr. Funke explained there are several potential volume control projects, and EOR and staff feel the 10-year total is about what the District will need for the identified sites. Annual spending will be determined through project feasibility.
- Manager Anderson suggested the District explore additional grants outside the Clean Water Fund.
- Manager Schmaltz asked for further explanation as to how sediment is related to phosphorus loading. Dr. Funke explained phosphorus often has a high fraction that is dissolved. The District also measures total suspended solids (TSS) which is a measure of sediment. There are particular areas known to have high TSS, and the District is targeting those for the stream and volume control projects.
- Manager Anderson stated it is the District's job to educate shoreline residents about how important native shorelines, including emergent aquatic vegetation, are for a healthy lake. Manager Dibble noted the potential shoreline restoration projects at dead end streets around Forest Lake.
- Dr. Funke explained the District has updated models calibrated with recent data to guide the necessary steps toward achieving water quality goals. The list of projects needed to achieve the goals is not as long as the District once thought. Manager Anderson requested the lake management district profiles contain an overview of land use changes in the watershed.
- Staff will add columns to the budget indicating potential partners and funding sources.

President Spence noted the projected deficit due to expenses exceeding estimate revenues, but there is a possibility the District will not spend 100% of the budget. He stated the District should measure progress through the outcomes achieved, rather than the spending. Mr. Kinney added that the District is high functioning when it comes to the progress toward goals achieved. He cautioned against using spending as a metric. He explained there are other sources of revenue available as well, such as sales tax. Manager Anderson noted the Clean Water Partnership loan program is still an option as well. Managers agreed that the District will need to manage cash flow on an annual basis to ensure there is sufficient revenue to fund all the planned activities.

4. Lower St. Croix One Watershed One Plan

There was discussion about the potential action to adopt the resolution and assign representatives. There was agreement to replace “but will supplement” with “but will serve as guidance” in the resolution. Manager Anderson offered to serve as the primary representative in 2021, and Manager Schmaltz may take over the primary representative position the next year.

Manager Anderson moved to adopt resolution 20-11-01 as amended. Seconded by Manager Dibble. Upon a roll call vote, the motion carried 4-0.

Manager	Aye	Nay	Absent
Jon Spence	X		
Jackie Anderson	X		
Stephen Schmaltz	X		
Jen Oknich			X
Jim Dibble	X		

5. Administrator Review Committee Bylaws Change

President Spence explained the purpose of the bylaws revision is to make the administrator performance review process more streamlined. Instead of a committee, managers will form a workgroup.

Manager Anderson moved to amend the bylaws replacing the word “committee” with “workgroup”. Seconded by Manager Schmaltz. Upon a roll call vote, the motion carried 4-0.

Manager	Aye	Nay	Absent
Jon Spence	X		
Jackie Anderson	X		
Stephen Schmaltz	X		
Jen Oknich			X
Jim Dibble	X		

President Spence and Manager Anderson agreed to serve on the workgroup this year.

6. Regulatory Enforcement

Mr. Kinney explained he recently communicated with the Chestnut Creek permit authorized agent and identified a path forward to resolve the wetland buffer noncompliant sites. He acknowledged Permitting Coordinator Ernst’s efforts to coordinate on this topic. Manager Spence offered to reach out to Forest Lake Mayor Mara Bain to discuss regulatory coordination and support.

7. Land Acquisition & Management

Mr. Kinney explained Ms. Heinz has led the development of a program outline, with input from other staff, for land acquisition which will help streamline the process and begin research on a new office space. He described some potential office space elements including storage, garage, workspace for water sample analysis, and potentially shared workspaces for staff who spend a majority of the time in the field. He explained that staff can continue to work from home for a portion of the time moving forward as well. There was discussion about a potential acquisition opportunity near Forest Lake 3rd Basin which may be utilized for a natural park space. Manager Anderson explained the Board previously discussed working with a realtor for land acquisitions. She indicated she would look into a consultant that presented at last year's MN Association of Watershed Districts conference.

There was consensus to direct Administrator Kinney to proceed contracting with a consultant to assist with the potential land acquisition

8. Summary and Approval of Board Direction

Board directives from the meeting were summarized.

- Manager Spence will reach out to Mayor Bain regarding permitting coordination.
- Manager Anderson will send Administrator Kinney information regarding the land acquisition consultant from MAWD.
- There were several directives during the 10-year budget discussing including addition of new partner/revenue columns, revenue projections, reviewing necessary permitting FTE, and revising the lake management district budget breakouts to include District-wide projects that will likely be more targeted toward a certain LMD.

The managers thanked Manager Dibble for his service on the Board, as this was his last meeting as a manager.

9. Adjourn

a) Next regular board meeting – November 19, 2020

Manager Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Manager Dibble. Upon vote, the motion carried 4-0, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

Manager	Aye	Nay	Absent
Jon Spence	X		
Jackie Anderson	X		
Stephen Schmaltz	X		
Jen Oknich			X
Jim Dibble	X		

Jen Oknich, Secretary _____