

5. Public Participation and Perceptions

5.1 Introduction

On March 25th, 2008, a public workshop on issues facing Crooked Lake was held at Crooked Lake Elementary School. Coon Creek Watershed District (CCWD) sponsored the workshop with promotional help from the Crooked Lake Area Association (CLAA). Several workshop members had attended a presentation on Shallow Lake Ecology by CCWD staff (Joe Bischoff, Wenck) at the CLAA winter membership meeting held one month earlier on February 28, 2008.

Seven questions were asked of the group at the public input workshop. The first two were posed to the group publicly. The next five questions were answered privately with individual responses on 3x5 cards with each question on a different color card and placed under categories determined by issues in Question 3. The questions posed were:

1. Why is Crooked Lake special (or not special)? *to live,*to play, *to be near
2. What aspects of Crooked Lake would you like to see improved?
3. What do you believe are the three major issues facing Crooked Lake?
4. What is causing these issues?
5. What factors contribute to these causes?
6. What actions do you think are needed to address each of these factors?
7. Who should take the lead in addressing each of these actions?

5.2 The Lake as a Special Element in the Community

The community surrounding Crooked Lake indicated a very strong attraction to the lake because of its physical character and recreational opportunities. People repeatedly indicated that the view of the lake and its discouragement of large boats because of lake size contributed to making Crooked Lake a wonderful area in which to live. In addition, numerous people spoke about being drawn to the lake by the number of recreational opportunities available: swimming, boating, fishing, floating, and wildlife viewing were all mentioned numerous times.

The fact that the lake and nearby neighborhoods were not busy or congested was cited as a quality that helped facilitate a “community feel” which changes or evolves with time but is still very present. Economic value was also cited, but far less than the lake itself and its recreational value.

Crooked Lake is clearly the focal point of the immediate community. It is an active element of the landscape—changing and responding to climate, season, and management in very dynamic ways. Residents are watchful of the lake and are very connected to its condition. Visual changes are watched in great detail including invasive species (EWM), water clarity, water level fluctuations, and lake use.

The lake is perceived as having shifted from being a ‘public’ lake in the past, when it hosted large summer gatherings of farmers and other Anoka County residents, to being more ‘private’ today. Although public accesses and lands are available for use, local residents sense a change in lake availability for those other than shoreline property owners. Fewer open, unbuilt areas of shoreline may have contributed to this perception.

Residents value both their internal and external attachments to the lake. A combination of these values guides decision-making about changes in the community and the lake edge. External attachments sometimes override the quieter, more personally held internal attachments. The following examples illustrate the difficulty in balancing the two:

- Fewer lots and areas left undeveloped in the watershed
- The sense that access to the lake is restricted for those not living on it
- Emergent vegetation is removed for aesthetic reasons and boat access, even though residents realize it is important for fish habitat.

5.3 Desired Improvements to the Lake

The public identified 15 aspects of Crooked Lake they would like to see improved. The list below is presented in priority based on responses and relevance to lake management:

- 1 Milfoil, weeds, invasive species
- 2 Water quality, Non-point pollution, Stormwater runoff, smell
- 3 Garbage & Trash, dog droppings
- 4 Water Clarity
- 5 Old Beach
- 6 Water Level & depth
- 7 Mucky bottom
- 8 Boats: too much wave action; slower & fewer
- 9 Noise: US 10 - Noise S End
- 10 Geese
- 11 Public Access
- 12 Public Beach - re-open
- 13 Car Dealership Lights
- 14 South Marsh
- 15 Fish

5.4 Perceived Lake Management Priorities

Of the 15 issues identified above, only eleven were identified when the group was asked to identify three priorities. Of the eleven, three issues clearly stood out above the rest:

1. Eurasian Water Milfoil control/management
2. Water quality (including water clarity and non-point pollution)
3. Muck

Trash and lake water levels were also identified. The tables on the following pages provide details on these top three issues.

Eurasian Water Milfoil, Weeds, and Invasive Species

Background	<p>The presence of Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM) and Curly leaf Pondweed (CLP) was the single biggest issue raised at the March 2008 workshop. It is seen as the single biggest liability to use and enjoyment of Crooked Lake, and in some instances to individual home and property values.</p>
Perceived Causes	<p>The majority of people believed that irresponsible people not cleaning their boats was the primary reason for the introduction and spread of EWM.</p> <p>A second group (22%) believed that the spread of EWM was due to the DNR policy limiting the treatment of EWM. Others indicated EWM presence was from wildlife, or low water levels.</p>
Perceived Contributing Factors	<p>The factors contributing to the above conditions were primarily viewed as a lack of concern, typically by boaters.</p> <p>A significant number of other people felt that there was a lack of political will at the state level and a lack of education concerning EWM. Another group felt a lack of enforcement, or ability to stop “dirty” boats from entering the lake.</p> <p>Others believed that the contributing factor to EWM was the lack of funds for EWM control. One individual noted that shallowness of the lake was the primary contributing factor.</p>
Perceived Remedies	<p><u>Chemical Treatment</u>: Almost half of the people in attendance supported chemical treatment of the lake to control EWM. Portions of that group spoke specifically to annual treatments while two individuals supported a whole lake treatment. One individual proposed increasing the size/percentage of the annual treatment area.</p> <p><u>Education</u>: The next largest group supported education primarily of boaters about the nature of EWM.</p> <p><u>Other approaches</u> included research, increased enforcement, harvesting, and closing the public access.</p>
Implementation Leadership Responsibilities	<p>The Minnesota DNR was seen as the obvious lead in addressing EWM, followed by the Crooked Lake Area Association, and the Coon Creek Watershed District.</p>

Water Quality Perceptions

Background

The term “water quality” is used in many contexts. In this section, public perceptions of water quality were determined from data gathered at the public workshop in March 2008.

Water quality is an important issue of concern to the community, ranking second behind, and sometimes considered impacted by, Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM). Water quality was defined as a combination of water clarity and non-point pollution, the latter phrase familiar to the audience. In fact, stormwater runoff and lawn fertilizer runoff, caused primarily from uneducated and, secondly, uneducated homeowners, had the highest number of responses.

Perceived Causes

The majority of people who indicated that water quality was one of the three major issues facing Crooked Lake indicated that fertilizer and stormwater runoff were the major contributors or threats to poor water quality in Crooked Lake.

Perceived Contributing Factors

The majority of people indicated that the principal causes for water quality problems in Crooked Lake were lack of education/understanding concerning lawn care, management of lawn clippings, and the use of fertilizer.

A second group identified infrastructure problems and people not caring or being aware of the impacts of letting some things drain to the lake. Still others indicated that water quality issues derived from a range of sources such as too many people, a lack of respect for the environment, geese, poor management of stormwater runoff, and lack of long term vision for the lake.

Perceived Remedies

Education: The vast majority of people who spoke to this issue believed that an education program targeting fertilizer and lawn and lake care was the best remedy.

Other remedies included intergovernmental coordination, regulation of fertilizers, enforcement, monitoring, street sweeping, and value prioritization.

Implementation Leadership Responsibilities

The vast majority of people who spoke to this issue believed that individual homeowners should take the lead, followed by the Crooked Lake Association, Coon Creek Watershed District and the MDNR. The cities and Anoka County were also mentioned.

Muck

Background	Muck, particularly on the north end of the lake, was the third most cited issue facing Crooked Lake. The muck is described as approximately 4 feet deep and is churned up by boaters, carp, and turtles.
Perceived Causes	The majority of people commenting on this issue believed that the muck present in the northern part of the lake was from the accumulation and decomposition of organic stormwater runoff. The remainder of the individuals attributed the source of the organic matter to vegetation growing in the lake.
Perceived Contributing Factors	People addressing the contributing factors to muck focused on the stormsewer system in the northern part of the lake.
Perceived Remedies	<u>Dredge</u> : The most popular remedy for muck was to dredge the northern bay, although education was also a popular remedy. <u>Other remedies</u> involved rerouting stormsewer, elimination of weeds contributing to muck formation, and research.
Implementation Leadership Responsibilities	The MN DNR was seen as providing the most leadership. The cities, county, watershed district, and lake association were viewed to have about the same level of involvement.

Trash

Background	Trash was the fourth most cited issue facing Crooked Lake, and the third most cited issue that citizens wanted addressed.
Perceived Causes	Sources and causes cited for trash were boaters, ice fisherman, and users of the fishing pier.
Perceived Contributing Factors	The underlying reason for littering was people who are apathetic, irresponsible, or simply unaware of the consequences of their action.
Perceived Remedies	The number one suggested remedy for trash and littering was enforcement. Secondary remedies education, increased City pick up, and closing both the fishing pier and the public access.
Implementation Leadership Responsibilities	The Cities of Andover and Coon Rapids were seen as the primary parties responsible for addressing this issue followed by the Crooked Lake Area Association and Anoka County.

Water Levels

Background

Water level in the lake was the fifth most cited aspect that people would like to see improved and the sixth most cited challenge facing the lake.

Perceived Causes

Only three individuals offered potential causes to the concern a lake levels. Two individuals cited “mother nature” and drought, and one individual cited potential construction but could not cite where.

Perceived Contributing Factors

The individuals who spoke to this concern cited a poor understanding of the hydrodynamics of the lake and a lack of a long-term perspective on the cumulative effects of construction as factors affecting water levels.

Perceived Remedies

The only suggestion in addressing this concern was education of developers, county, and cities of the possible causes of water level fluctuations.

Implementation Leadership Responsibilities

The Minnesota DNR was seen as the only agency who might address this concern.