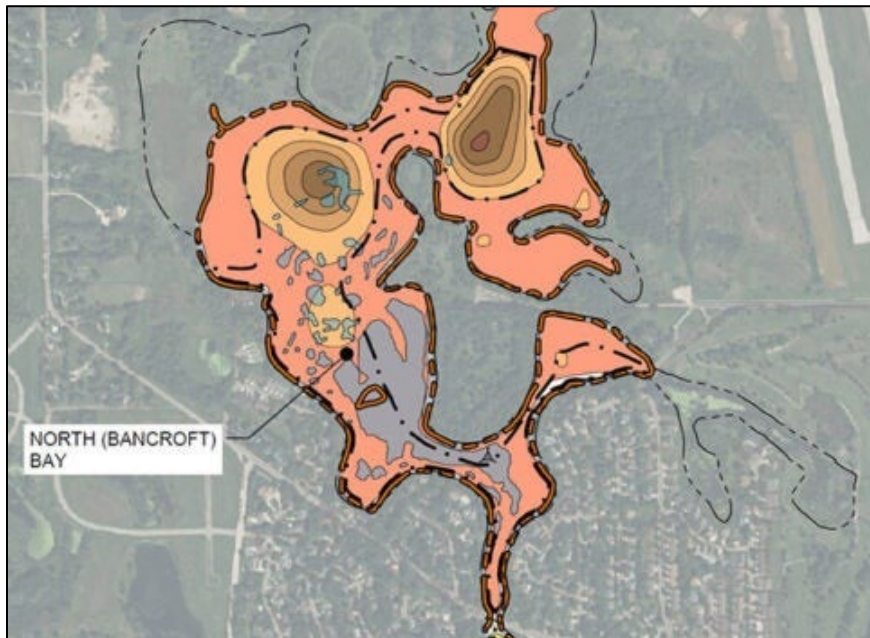


No Fountain Lake dredging this summer as Watershed District plans an appeal regarding permit for project



By Sarah Stultz
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This map shows the Watershed district's proposed dredge cuts within the thicker black dashed line. The orange areas show high phosphorus levels with the brown areas having the highest levels. The light blue and grayish-colored areas represent areas with yellow lily growth.

The dredging of Fountain Lake will not take place this summer because of issues tied to permitting for the project. Shell Rock River Watershed District Administrator Andy Henschel said during the Watershed Board of Managers meeting Tuesday that after watershed district staff and engineers had multiple meetings with DNR representatives over the last few months, reduced the scope of the project and developed plans to address some of the DNR's concerns, the DNR agreed verbally last week to only a limited dredge permit but not the full permit for the project. Henschel said the district plans to file an appeal over the decision and is awaiting more information about this process.

"I believe that this feels like we're talking to a brick wall when it comes to this. It's, it's almost disgusting — the effort and the work that our engineers and staff have put into this, and to me, the DNR has had their minds set since day one since we turned in that permit that they were not going to let us get in there and remove the material we need for clean water."



This map shows a scaled back proposal from the DNR for Bancroft Bay dredging in the areas under the hatched lines with a channel in between.

Henschel said Fountain Lake, which is on the state’s impaired waters list, will never be able to meet the nutrient water quality standards if internal loading of phosphorus is not completely addressed in Bancroft Bay. The bay has been found to have some of the highest levels of phosphorus released during conditions that favor loading of any sediment cores across the lake. The DNR has expressed concern mainly about the Bancroft Bay portion of the project and the impact it would have on vegetation in the bay, as well as Blanding’s turtles in the area, though Henschel said the district came up with a Blanding’s turtle avoidance plan to meet permit conditions and offered a staff observer during dredging operations. It also came up with a vegetative aquatic management plan.

He said he believed the district addressed every concern the DNR had and even narrowed the scope of the project down to where they could still have a successful project. “This will not get our water quality issue under control,” he said of the most recent map of the bay the DNR proposed to the district. He said he is also frustrated that the reasons behind why the DNR won’t approve the permit have changed from meeting to meeting with the district.

Henschel said he thinks the only route to go forward is through the appeals process if they want a successful project, and the district will continue to work with Sen. Gene Dornink and Rep. Peggy Bennett along the way. He did not know the timing of an appeal or the cost. “I know if we go with this (the limited permit), it will not get us to where we want to be,” he said.

This is the final phase of dredging for the lake, which also includes the east basin of the lake’s main bay and part of the channel to Bancroft Bay. The first phase of dredging of the lake began in 2018.

Manager Brad Kramer asked if the district would still be within the timeline for the bonding funds awarded for the project, and Henschel said there should not be a concern.