

**LAKE MINNETONKA CONSERVATION DISTRICT
AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS) TASK FORCE MEETING
MINUTES**

8:30 a.m., Friday, October 21, 2011

LMCD Office, 23505 Smithtown Road (Suite 120), Shorewood, MN 55331

Present: Kelsey Page, LMCD Board; Chris Jewett, LMCD Board; Jeff Morris, LMCD Board; Roger Swanson, LMCD Board; Chip Welling, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR); Sean Sisler, MN DNR; John Barten, Three Rivers Park District (TRPD); Brian Vlach, TRPD; Dick Osgood, Lake Minnetonka Association (LMA); Kelly Dooley, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD); Jay Green, Anglers for Habitat; Gabriel Jabbour; Lisa Whalen; Dick Woodruff; Greg Nybeck, LMCD Executive Director. Also present: Mayor Lili McMillan, City of Orono; Terry Bryce; Tom Frahm; Jack Kimball; Thomas Lowe.

Approval of Agenda

Jabbour stated that he would like to have discussion of the functions of this Task Force, including where to go from this point, added to the agenda. The agenda was approved as amended. Page stated that this would be discussed later in the meeting under "Other Business".

Minutes

The minutes from the 6/10/11 AIS Task Force Meeting were accepted as amended, noting that Welling had a few minor typos that will get corrected.

Lake Minnetonka Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM) Projects:

- Assessment of 2008-2011 Coordinated Herbicide Treatments
Page stated that a boat tour, in which a number of the Task Force members attended, took place in August to view the bays treated in 2011. He asked Nybeck for further background on this agenda item.

Nybeck reviewed his staff memo, dated 10/13/11, which provided focus of the discussion planned for the Task Force at this meeting. Highlights included:

- A Lake Vegetation Management Plan (LVMP) was created for this project by this Task Force in 2008 for Carmans, Grays, and Phelps Bays. The primary goals were to evaluate: 1) whether EWM and curlyleaf pondweed (CLP) could be managed on a whole bay with lower dosages of herbicides, and 2) whether these treatments would damage the native plants on these three bays.
- The LMCD Board of Directors has adopted a Strategic Plan for Lake Minnetonka. One objective in this Plan is to "Reduce the levels of existing AIS". A goal for this objective is for the LMCD to "Manage the three-bay treatment project on Carmans, Grays, and Phelps Bays (2010-2012)". He provided further background on the roles of the LMCD and LMA on this project. This Task Force has been targeted to serve as the technical committee for this project.
- A task has been established for this goal in 2011. In particular, to "Evaluate the three bay treatment project with the goals and objectives established in the 2008 LVMP". This evaluation is to be done through the AIS Task Force, with a Report as to expansion to other bays and funding options, to be presented to the LMCD Board in December.
- He reviewed materials included in the packet for discussion. These included: 1) a copy of the approved LVMP including redlined changes previously recommended by Welling, and 2) a series of spreadsheets prepared by the LMCD relating to a cost assessment, an acreage assessment, and a cost per acres assessment. Other information that has also been provided included: 1) sechi disk readings from the MCWD, and 2) preliminary draft data from MN DNR and U.S. Army Corps of

- Engineers (Army Corps) from 2007-2011 to assist the Task Force in the discussion at this meeting. He recommended that the discussion focus on this information and avoid anecdotal discussion.
- He recommended four Action Items for this agenda item. These included:
 - 1) A discussion of the goals and objectives (including actions) laid out in the LVMP. A question for the Task is whether to assess the goals based on the 2008 LVMP or the unapproved LVMP that has assumed changes.
 - 2) A discussion of whether this project should be expanded to other bays in 2013.
 - 3) To possibly schedule a special meeting in November to: a) discuss a draft Report summarizing the discussion at this meeting, or b) continue the discussion from this meeting.
 - 4) Assign a Task Force member(s) to present the Report to the LMCD Board and any other interested party. Barten has offered to serve in this capacity.
 - He entertained questions and comments from the Task Force.

Page recapped his understanding of the approved LVMP from 2008. This included:

- To control EWM and CLP;
- To manage EWM and CLP to: 1) reduce its interference with recreational activities, 2) reduce lakeshore cleanup, and 3) improve the ecological health of the Lake;
- To reduce EWM and CLP to 20% from what they were previously, while maintaining it as this level;
- Water quality on these bays would remain the same;
- User perception analysis would take place on an annual basis;
- Natives would be protected on these bays, with limitations on private treatments on these bays;
- This LVMP, which is set to expire on 1/1/13, could be used as the basis for expansion to other bays; and
- He asked Welling to provide background on: 1) changes assumed to this LVMP over the years, and 2) new data that has been provided.

Welling stated that he had recently talked with the Army Corps about the status of the Final Report for the 2011 project. He reported that progress has been made; however, the full Report has not been completed. He summarized a Report that he prepared, in consultation with the Army Corps, based on information that has been collected from 2007-2011 relating to the goals and objectives in LVMP. He made the following comments:

- He reviewed the percent of frequencies of EWM on the three bays. This data is important and better than subjective data. However, the presence or frequency of occurrence data does not reflect abundance of the plants sampled. He hoped that estimate of abundance could be provided in the near future inexpensively using hydroacoustic technologies.
- The LMA and a lot of users have perceived dramatic improvements because the EWM is less conspicuous in some of the bays when compared to pre-treatments. Nevertheless, the EWM is still there and will come back.
- A number of changes have been made over the years with the herbicide treatment protocol. In general, the effectiveness of herbicides is a function of: 1) the amount of herbicides to which the plants are exposed, and 2) the duration of the exposure. He reviewed the distinct features of Carmans, Grays, and Phelps Bays, as well an assessment of the treatments conducted from 2008 through 2011.
- While these treatments are being done, one of the goals of the LVMP is to maintain or increase native plants as indicated by results from point intercept surveys. Similar to the frequencies of EWM, he hoped to have a better idea on the mass or quantities of native plants in the near future.
- A lot more data is forthcoming; however, this data addresses most of the key response variables.

- These projects involve a great deal of effort, a significant amount of resources, and this effort is never over because eradication of EWM is not taking place. Instead, the EWM is being reduced to a low level, with the suppression not being permanent.
- He entertained questions or comments from the Task Force.

Page asked Welling to comment on whether the project has met the goals and objectives of the LVMP.

Welling stated that he believed the project has met the revised goals and objectives, which have not been formally approved. There was clearly a reduction of native plants on Grays Bay in 2009; however, these native plants have recovered. EWM is still present on Grays Bay; however, it is not as matted and widespread as it was prior to the treatment regime. There are still questions with regards to the long-term implications on native plants on such a management program.

Dooley provided background on MCWD water quality sample charts from 2007 to 2010 on these three bays. She believed that these charts could support Welling's comments and document that water quality on these three bays meet the goals and objectives in the LVMP. The Task Force briefly discussed what could have contributed to reduced water quality on Grays Bay (and elsewhere) in 2009 on Lake Minnetonka.

A summary of the Task Force discussion was as follows:

- The initial expectations underlying baywide treatments were that these treatments would be done initially for two to three years, after which the distribution of EWM would be low and require reduced treatments. The Task Force discussed how this has progressed.
- Whether accomplishing the 20% point intercept frequency standard for EWM and CLP was accomplished from year to year (and bay to bay). Feedback varied amongst the Task Force and there was discussion of what factors may contribute when this standard was not accomplished.
- Whether native plants have been impacted by these treatments, with feedback varying amongst the Task Force.
- A discussion of further information pending from the Army Corps, including when the Task Force will receive this.
- Limited feedback on the spreadsheets prepared by the LMCD. In particular: 1) for the costs assessments for EWM harvesting, this analysis should include costs for depreciated harvesting equipment, and 2) a request from Osgood that the cost assessment for herbicide treatments should be spread over two years.
- What effect that zebra mussels could have on water clarity on these three bays in the future.
- When the Report is prepared for this project by the Task Force, it should clearly state what has been learned based on this five-year pilot project.
- The need to assign some dollar values to the MN DNR and Army Corps in-kind services to this project. After five years, it is possible that both agencies may not participate in this project; which would affect future budgets
- Whether the changing of the goals and objectives from the LVMP in the middle of the five-year project made sense.
- An important issue is fisheries and the habitat, with some Task Force members expressing concern that funding and assessments of this has not taken place for this project.
- A question of what level of information is needed to make a decision on whether to recommend expanding this project to other bays on Lake Minnetonka. In particular since public funding has been utilized on this project.
- A question of public funding and whether it was appropriate for these types of projects. For example, this herbicide treatment project could have impact on properties that the TRPD has on other lakes,

- estimated at 20 to 30. If a request is made for whole lake treatments that are paid by the abutting property owners, this is a dilemma for the TRPD until this project gets past the demonstration phase.
- Whether the MN DNR should permit these types of projects, including how the MN DNR might respond to permit requests beyond the five bays treated in 2011.

Discussion of Role of Future Management Techniques

Page stated that Dr. Mike Netherland communicated at the June meeting that a number of other jurisdictions around the country use a combination of mechanical harvesting and herbicide treatments. He believed that this may be true for Lake Minnetonka and he asked Nybeck for further background on the cost comparisons between the two management tools.

Nybeck reviewed costs spreadsheets from 2008 through 2011. For herbicide treatments, the costs ranged from a low of \$434 per acre in 2008 to a high of \$693 per acre in 2011. For mechanical harvesting, the costs ranged from a low of \$257 per acre in 2011 to a high of \$307 per acre in 2008. He clarified that the costs per acre for harvesting did not include funds for depreciated equipment. Also, he did not believe that that an acre treated with herbicides can be compared to an acre harvested.

Page stated that the two remaining harvesters of the LMCD were purchased in 2002 and 2004. Additionally, the LMCD has funds available to purchase a new harvester, which would include insurance funds to be allocated from the capsized harvester. He asked for comments from Task Force.

A summary of the Task Force discussion was as follows:

- The estimated annual budget for the harvesting program, excluding depreciated equipment, is \$90,000. A question was raised as to how this same amount of funding could be used for herbicide treatments.
- Conducting mechanical harvesting, at a reduced budget and more efficiently, was raised. This has been done by the LMCD in the past and Task Force members that had ideas were asked to put them in writing.
- Potential design flaws of the remaining two harvesters were raised.
- Pros and cons of mechanical harvesting were discussed.
- A general discussion of mechanical harvesting vs. herbicide treatments (including the problems each tool can address). A number of Task Force members commented that neither tool should be discarded.
- The LMA has changed its position with regards to mechanical harvesting. This new position includes: 1) harvesting and herbicide treatments should be done within the context of an overall plant management plan, and 2) the purchase of a harvester at this time would be premature because it commits the LMCD to this tool for the long-term. Osgood pointed out that he believed the need for harvesting has been reduced with the five bays treated with herbicides. Additionally, he pointed out what he believed are flaws with the three spreadsheets and he questioned whether cost per acre was a good metric for comparison.
- Is there new technology available for mechanical harvesters that the LMCD should consider (such as how to better deal with fragments).
- Can the goals and objectives for the management of EWM be met in 2012 without a new harvester. It was clarified that: 1) a decision on whether to make a new purchase has not been made by the LMCD Board, and 2) a question was raised as to whether the capsized harvester could have been repaired. There was discussion on potential future harvester replacement needs.
- Contract harvesting options, as an alternative to the purchase of a harvester, needs to be explored.
- There were no recommendations from the Task Force on this agenda item at this time.

Other Business

A number of Task Force members believed that there was a need to evaluate the functions of the AIS Task Force (goals and objectives) beyond discussion of herbicide treatments. The consensus was that this needed to be better defined by the LMCD Board of Directors.

Next AIS Task Force Meeting

The next AIS Task Force Meeting was scheduled for Friday, 12/9/11, at 8:30 a.m. in the LMCD office.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:41 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Greg Nybeck
Executive Director