

## Lake Winnebago 2005 Drawdown Conference Call Notes

1. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Detroit District held its annual drawdown conference call on 5 January 2005. The call began at approximately 10:30 a.m. EST with Ms. Marie Strum starting off with a round of self-introductions. A list of participants may be found at the end of this document.
2. **Presentation of the Agenda.** Ms. Strum then followed up with a brief introduction to the agenda and explained the purpose of the call was to discuss Lake Winnebago winter drawdown, both the timing and extent. Mr. Phil Ross then gave a detailed description of the agenda and described how topics on the agenda would be covered.
3. **Stage and Outflow.** Since the Regulation Meeting in October 2004, water levels on Lake Winnebago have remained near 2.5 feet as measured from the Oshkosh datum. Outflows ranged from 2,000 to 4,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). An explanation was provided when the outflow was outside of that range. Mr. Ross also noted the outflow at Appleton and the inflow at Oshkosh was nearly equal therefore the level of the lake should remain stable. Mr. Bob Stanick noted on December 18<sup>th</sup> he asked if we could refrain from gate operations due to an icing problem. Gates needed to be closed to maintain a constant 2.5 ft level on Lake Winnebago, however, they were frozen open and the temperatures were sufficiently cold to prevent the steamers used to deice the gates from working properly. USACE determined that the slight decline in water level that would result from keeping the gate open another two days would not cause any problems. By December 20<sup>th</sup> the gates were operational and adjustments were made. Mr. Bruce Gomm from Kaukauna Utilities stated they also had a problem with frazil ice and some of the generators. The USACE Kewaunee staff worked with Kaukauna Utilities to adjust gates to compensate for Kaukauna Utilities' problems with their generators.
4. **Snowpack.** Mr. Brian Hahn from the National Weather Service in Sullivan, WI described the basin as follows: There is little to no snow in the Fox River watershed. However, there was 3 to 5 inches possible during the course of that evening. The Wolf watershed has 3 to 5 inches on the ground already and is expecting another 1 to 3 inches over the next day or so. Mr. Hahn also mentioned the frost depth as measured at the water treatment plant in Oshkosh, WI was about 1 foot. Ms Strum asked if that data was available on the web and Mr. Hahn agreed to provide the link to her. Mr. Hahn also provided a temperature and precipitation outlook. For the next 8 to 14 days the basin should expect near normal temperatures and above average precipitation. However, for the next 90 days the basin can expect below average precipitation and near normal temperatures. Mr. Dan Rudebeck from the Lake Poygan Sportsmen's Club also noted that the ground is saturated and his local forecast was calling for several inches of snow.

5. **Ice Cover.** Mr. Rudebeck reported the upper river and lakes have significant ice cover. The north shore of Lake Poygan has about 9 inches of ice while the south shore has up to 13 inches. Mr. Steve Brand from the City of Oshkosh, stated that Lake Winnebago appears to be mostly frozen over as far as he can see but the ice is not thick and shows signs of deterioration in places. Minor ice push along the shore was also reported. Mr. Gomm said some ice has formed on the Lower Fox but not very much. Mr. Stanick added it is mostly open water. Mr. Gomm indicated he would like to see complete ice cover on the lower Fox prior to beginning drawdown, however, he is not opposed to opening a half gate now. Mr. Stanick agreed and stated we would prefer to have a gradual increase in flow. Mr. Hahn reported the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of January is historically the coldest period of the year across the basin. Mr. Tom Piete of International Paper noted frazil ice is a devastating concern of his and can cause major problems in his plant. He is a major proponent of letting ice form over the Fox prior to drawdown. Mr. Brand said ice is not a problem for his municipality.

6. **Drawdown.** Mr. Ross suggested a drawdown target of 1.68 feet as measured from the Oshkosh datum by March 1<sup>st</sup>. Nobody opposed the target however, Mr. Gomm suggested waiting a couple of weeks to let ice develop prior to a major increase in flow. Again, nobody opposed the idea. Several people stated the drawdown target of 1.68 feet should be adjusted if basin conditions warrant. This will be determined in another 4 to 6 weeks. Mr. Hahn indicated that in another month his office will have analyzed several snow cores and have a good idea of snow water equivalent. The data will be useful in deciding if the 1.68 ft target should be adjusted. The Corps stated that they do not expect that the draw down will be to a level any higher than the 1.68 ft level, but a very significant snowpack late in February may indicate a need to draw the lake down lower than the 1.68 ft level.

#### 7. **Open Discussion.**

Mr. Jim Bonetti of USACE asks if there have been problems with the Appleton AVM. Ms. Strum mentions that there was in July, but ice does not seem to be causing problems.

Ms. Carla Kramer of International Paper inquires if she can be notified of flow changes in the lower Fox River. Mr. Stanick agrees to coordinate with Ms. Kramer 920.766.8895

Mr. Bill Hitchcock, a concerned citizen asks if we have a spring drought and we drawdown this winter, could we have problems refilling the lake. Ms. Strum discussed that the Corps has researched this issue and found that even in the record drought of 1988 there were no problems refilling the lake in the spring. The Corps does not anticipate that refill would be a problem, but we monitor conditions in the basin very closely so that we are aware of significant shifts in hydrologic conditions in the basin.

Ms. Gloria Nelson, a concerned citizen asked if drawdown causes ice to rip out cane beds from the ground thereby being an environmental concern. Mr. Rudebeck explained that actually, high water is the big problem because it causes ice to scour the cane on the edge of the lake. It is much better to have low water after the freeze so that ice does not form around the plants.

A representatives from the High Cliff Yacht club asked why refill starts on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Strum clarified the graph and stated refill begins at ice out. The latest our records show refill starting is April 15. If ice out were in the middle of March the refill would begin then. If ice were on the lake later than April 15<sup>th</sup>, refill would still begin after ice out. Ms Strum also noted if ice were on the lake no one would be boating at that time.

A discussion of spring refill ensued. There were suggestions that the Corps needs to conduct economic studies to have a better grasp of what low levels will do to the local economy. Mr. Michael O'Bryan, Acting Deputy Program Manager of the USACE Detroit District acknowledged that the economic impact of boating is quite large; however, you need to put a price tag on the environment and other user groups too and that can be quite large as well. Mr. O'Bryan also stated that the Detroit District has no funding to conduct such a study. Several issues about when the spring refill would occur were brought up and each question was clarified. The USACE representatives mentioned several times that there are a number of user groups on the system and the lake will not be regulated in the interests of a specific group. The Corps must balance all competing uses in the basin and make decisions that take all these factors into account. One group's desires for water levels often conflict with another groups' wishes.

The Corps stated that the next conference call would be in the early spring to discuss the spring refill. The date and time of the call will be posted to the Corps' website at [www.lre.usace.army.mil/glhh/winnebago](http://www.lre.usace.army.mil/glhh/winnebago).

### **Participants:**

**USACE:** Mike O'Bryan, Marie Strum, Phil Ross, Steve Running, Dave Barilovich, Jim Bonetti, Bob Stanick, Dave Haefs, Joe Kalies, Tim Calappi

### **Other Agencies:**

Bruce Gomm, Mike Pederson – Kaukauna Utilities  
Frank Krieger – Kimberly Clark/Neenah Paper  
Tom Piette, Carla Kramer – International Paper  
Steve Brand - City of Oshkosh  
Tom Conrad – City of Oshkosh, retired  
Brian Hahn – National Weather Service  
Representative – Calumet County Land and Water Management  
Chad Cook – University of Wisconsin Extension Center

Rob Way – Winnebago County

Citizens and Groups:

Skip Palermo – Appleton Yacht Club

Dan Rudebeck – Poygan Sportsmen Club

Randy Kroll – High Cliff Harbor Commission

Allison Blackwell – Harbor Bar

Gloria Nelson

Phil Dominick

Bill Hitchcock

Dave & Allison Blackmer