

## Lake Winnebago 2009 Spring Refill Conference Call Minutes

- 1. Introduction.** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Detroit District held its annual Spring Refill conference call on 8 April 2009. The call began at approximately 10:00 a.m. CDT with Mr. John Allis starting with addressing some administrative notes and then self-introductions of those in attendance. A list of participants may be found at the end of this document.
- 2. Presentation of the Agenda.** Mr. Allis followed with a brief overview of the agenda and explained the purpose of the call was to discuss Lake Winnebago spring refill, both the timing and extent.
- 3. Basin Conditions and Significant Events since the January drawdown conference call.** Mr. Allis provided an update of basin conditions over the last few months since the 8 January 2009 conference call. Some of the major highlights during this timeframe are as follows:  
Mr. Allis stated that conditions this winter were cold and snowy similar to 2008. About ½ of this year's snowfall fell in December with this year's snowfall a little higher than last year's. During the months of December through January 2009 the region experienced cold temperatures approximately 6° below normal. The month of February was warmer, but relatively cold with no warm-up period. We had a good drawdown period with few gate changes. The winter drawdown target of 1.68 ft. was achieved on March 3, 2009.  
  
During the 1<sup>st</sup> week of March, the USACE increased the number of open gates to accommodate the increase in inflows into the system. Most of March was uneventful until a March 24<sup>th</sup> storm dropped over 2 inches of rain on the basin. In fact, both Appleton and Oshkosh reported record rainfalls for that day. Fortunately, the snowpack was gone prior to this storm and the USACE opened gates prior to the storm. This reaction minimized the lake level rise with the existing ice cover. Mr. Allis stated that no significant storm events have occurred since March 24<sup>th</sup>.  
  
Mr. Allis reported that as of today, the level of Lake Winnebago is 2.33 ft. with 6 Menasha tainter gates, 7 Neenah needles and 5 Neenah tainter gates open. He stated that recent strong westerly winds caused ice shoves along the Lake Winnebago's shoreline. Some ice shoves were as high as 25 ft. Fortunately, no major shoreline damages were reported. He stated that by keeping as many gates open as possible and maintaining a lower lake level, significant shoreline damage was prevented. Finally, he reported that no significant precipitation events occurred during the early part of April.
- 4. Ice Cover.** Mr. Techlow reported that the upriver lakes area, Lakes Butte des Morts and Winneconne are ice-free. The northern ½ of Lake Winnebago was mostly ice-free and the SW portion just south of Oshkosh was jammed up with ice pushed to this shoreline by recent high winds. He added that the western ½ of

Lake Poygan is covered with broken/rotten ice. Given the existing weather forecasts and the condition of the existing ice pack, Mr. Techlow believes ice-out on Lake Winnebago and the upriver lakes will occur in about 1 week

5. **River Conditions.** Mr. Allis reported that the Lower Fox River conditions were relatively steady from January through mid-March period. As the snow pack melted, runoff into the system increased. As a result, outflows were increased from about 3,000 cfs to 7,000 cfs to accommodate these increases. Today, with all available gates and needle open, the outflows, considered high for this time of the year and above average, are between 11,000 cfs and 13,000 cfs.
6. **Spring Weather Forecasts.** Mr. Tom Helman of the National Weather Service provided the following short and long-term outlooks.

	<u>8-14 Day</u>	<u>30 Day</u>
Precipitation	average	below average
Temperatures	average	below average

Mr. Helman informed the participants a low pressure system may track north early next week and drop some rain on the region. He also stated that the El Niño pattern will still linger for SE Wisconsin this year and may cause drier and cooler temperatures for the later this spring and summer.

7. **Refill Plan.** Mr. Allis stated that the lake is 2.33 ft today. The USACE goal is to keep the lake level near its present level, and below 2.40ft for the remainder of the month. With the inflows starting to fall off, 3 tainters at the Menasha Dam were closed this morning in an effort to meet this objective. Beginning on May 1, gate adjustments will be made to allow Lake Winnebago to gradually fill to 3.0 ft by June 1. Once the target of 3.0 ft is reached, this level will be held for the navigation season which runs through the beginning of October. .
- 8 **Open Discussion.** Mr. Bill Hitchcock stated that last year's rise to 3.0 ft. by June 1 was acceptable. He feels that a 2.4 ft level on May 1 may be low and may prevent the USACE from reaching its goal by June 1. He said boaters need water early in the season to float their boats off their trailers. Mr. Allis assured him that we will try to achieve a level between 2.7-2.8 ft by mid-May. Mr. Hitchcock concurred.

Mr. Jack Couillard, a property owner along the north shore of Lake Winnebago, was concerned that 2.4 ft is too high today. Mr. Allis reiterated that today's level is 2.33 ft and the USACE will maintain this level through the end of the month and until all the ice is gone from Lake Winnebago.

Mr. Andrew McMyler, from Menasha, was concerned about having all the gates open at both the Menasha and Neenah Dams. With all the gates open, the level on Little Lake Butte des Morts today is very high. He suggested less outflows in the spring and more during the summer months. He also had some questions about

the Lower Fox River levels. Mr. Dave Haefs explained to him that there is a bottle neck at Grignon Rapids where the river narrows. The USACE can only discharge so much water through this area at a time. There are some instances where this pool backs up because of this condition. Mr. McMyler also inquired as to how the river operations are conducted from Detroit. Mr. Allis informed him that decisions are made jointly between the Detroit District and Kaukauna personnel. The Kaukauna Office operates the gates on site and coordinates on a daily basis with the users.

Mr. Pat O'Brien from Lake Poygan complimented the USACE for trying to regulate the system to please everybody. He said it is a monumental task. He was aware that the level of Lake Winnebago has to be drawn down during various times of the year. He iterated that the Lake Winnebago drawdown adversely impacts the level on Lake Poygan. He asked that the USACE not draw the level of Lake Winnebago too far so Lake Poygan has sufficient levels for the summer fishing enthusiasts.

Mr. Mike Suha of Appleton was concerned about the algae blooms on Lake Winnebago during the summer. Mr. Techlow of the WDNR stated that there is significant algae bloom development in early July on Lake Winnebago. These are primarily due to hot and dry conditions with no winds to move the algae around. Drought conditions further compound the condition. Only rain and winds can effectively break up the algae growths.

Mr. Tom Tomter inquired about the status of the update on the Lake Winnebago Fox-Wolf River Basin Facts Book. Mr. Allis replied that the booklet is being revised and the USACE will try to link it as a pdf file on our web page shortly.

9. **Additional Announcements.** Ms. Marie Strum, Assistant Chief, Engineering & Technical Services Division informed the participants to be aware that a notice announcing a public meeting about the recent press release on the Lower Fox River Dams assessments will be posted in mid-June. Any specific questions about the notice may be directed the Kaukauna Office at (920)766-3531.

Mr. Allis also reminded participants that another conference call would be scheduled for the Summer. At this call agencies would discuss the possibility of a step down in the Winnebago lake level early in the fall. This would help facilitate a lower level heading into freeze up which could prevent shoreline ice damage during the early winter months.

Mr. Allis adjourned the call at approximately 11:45 CDT.

**Participants:**

**USACE:** Marie Strum, John Allis, Dave Barilovich, Keith Kompoltowicz, Alicia Lane, Dave Haefs, Mike Stencil.

**Other Agencies:**

Tyler Vorpagel – US Representative’s Petri’s Office

Art Techlow – Wisconsin DNR

Mike Pedersen – Kaukauna Utilities

Rob Elliott – U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Tom Helman – NWS

Patrick, Rengers, USCG-Sheboygan

**Citizens and Groups:**

Skip Palermo – Appleton Yacht Club

Bill Hitchcock – Windpoint Harbor

Chad Casper – Winnebago County

Jack Couillard – Property Owner

Randy Kroll – Property Owner

Mike Apple – Property Owner

Tom Buchta – Neenah Harbor Commission

Tom Konrad – Property Owner

Andrew McMyler – Little Lake Butte des Morts

James Spence – North Shore

Mike O’Brien – Neenah

Jack Quigley – Omro

Patrick O’Brien – Lake Poygan

Tom Tomter - Property Owner

Mike Suha – Appleton

Larry Wattering - Neenah

Candice Molano – Property Owner