

Lake Winnebago 2010 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 13 April 2010. The call began at approximately 1:00 p.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 7 January 2010 conference call. Below are some of the highlights:

Mr. Allis stated that conditions this winter were quite different from last year. In Oshkosh, only 32" of snow fell over the winter as compared to the average 42" and the 63" that fell last year. He noted that half of the 32" fell during one storm in December. During January and February, the region experienced slightly warmer temperatures that were approximately 3° above average. We had a steady drawdown period with few gate changes; only 2 gate changes were made during January and February. The winter drawdown target of 1.68 ft. was achieved on February 16, 2010, which was two weeks early.

During March, warm and dry conditions persisted throughout the basin. Precipitation was 1.5" below average and the temperatures were nearly 7° above average. Toward the end of March, there were some days with temperatures in the 70's and 80's. There were some ice shoves reported on the south and west shores of the lake near the time of the ice break up. Because of the warm temperatures, ice-out occurred early on March 29th. From the end of March through early April, the dry conditions continued. The average temperature for April was 10.5° above normal. As a result of a warm March and April, the vegetation growth started early.

Typically, around the time of this refill call, inflows would be between 7,000 cfs and 12,000 cfs and ramping up. Instead, the inflows have been averaging the 4,000 cfs range. The current conditions are similar to what we would experience one month from now. It could be said that we are currently one month ahead of a normal year. Keeping this in mind, we decided to capture the water that is currently available expecting that the dry conditions could continue. By April 5th, we only had one gate open while typically our gate settings are in the double digits. Finally, during the first week of April, the basin received 1.5"-2" of rain. The USACE opened 5 gates in 3 days to prevent the lake from rising too quickly

because the lake was already higher than its spring average and we didn't want to lose flood storage.

Mr. Allis reported that as of today, the level of Lake Winnebago is 2.56 ft. with 3 Menasha tainter gates and 2 Neenah tainter gates open. The current lake level is a little higher than the average lake level for this time of year. He re-iterated that we are keeping the lake a little higher than usual to account for the dry conditions and the early start we had on the spring season.

4. Ice Cover

All of the lakes are ice free.

5. River Conditions

Mr. Allis reported that the Lower Fox River conditions were relatively steady from January through early March. Outflows averaged between 2,500 cfs and 3,000 cfs as we controlled the drawdown. There were only 2 gate changes during January and February. With the snowpack disappearing early this year, the USACE had to increase the outflows to near 8,000 cfs. Once dry conditions moved into the basin, the USACE decreased the outflows to near 2,000 cfs toward the end of March. Typically, the USACE is sending approximately 12,00 cfs down the river at this time of year.

6. Spring Weather Forecasts

Mr. Brian Hahn of the National Weather Service provided the following short and long-term outlooks.

	<u>8-14 Day</u>	<u>3 Month</u>
Precipitation	below average	equal chances of above, below and average
Temperatures	average	equal chances of above, below and average

Mr. Hahn informed the participants a front will be moving through the region in the next couple of days. Not much rain is expected. Temperatures are going to rise to the 70's during the day and drop into the 40's at night.

7. Refill Plan

Mr. Allis stated that the lake is 2.56 ft today. The USACE goal is to keep the lake level between its current level and 2.70 ft. for the remainder of the month. This band will allow the USACE to adjust according to weather conditions. If basin conditions remain dry, the USACE will try to hold the lake level near the higher end of the band. Keeping the level higher will provide some cushion for hitting the 3.0 ft. summer target. However, if wet conditions develop, the USACE will attempt to hold the lake level closer to today's level through the end of April. Keeping the level lower will allow for more storage on the lake. Beginning on May 1, gate adjustments will be made (if necessary) 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

Dr. Amy Lilienfeld asked Mr. Allis to explain the conflict between raising and lowering the water level on Lake Winnebago. Mr. Allis explained that there are many competing interests in the Lake Winnebago basin. There are environmental interests, hunters, fishermen, boaters, hydropower entities, municipal facilities, industrial facilities and other uses that all have specific needs for the water levels and flow on the Lower Fox River. The USACE attempts to address each of the stakeholder's interests by holding conference calls in the winter for drawing down the lake and in the spring for refilling the lake. The USACE also holds an annual regulation meeting in October of each year near Appleton, WI. These meetings and conference calls provide a platform for stakeholders to express their needs and opinions. Our regulation strategy is a direct result of these open discussions.

Mr. Mark Radl had a follow up question to Dr. Lilienfeld's question. He asked if there were any laws against dredging near boat launches. He stated that a 5" difference in water level can be the difference between damaging a boat or successfully launching a boat. He asked if the DNR had any laws against dredging sediment near boat launches; are there concerns about contaminated sediment? Mr. O'Bryan stated that identified critical areas would most likely benefit from dredging. He further explained that the wind can affect the water level more than 5" for a brief period of time or even for days at a time. Mr. Techlow from the Wisconsin DNR stated that if dredging were to be approved, the applicant would have to demonstrate a public benefit. He noted that there is funding available for dredging and a permit must be submitted. Mr. Techlow added that Asylum Bay is scheduled to be dredged this year. Regarding sediment issues on Lake Winnebago, Mr. Techlow said that PCB's are not a concern and the Lake Winnebago sediment testing usually come up clean.

Bill Hitchcock inquired about the release and availability of the Lake Winnebago Facts Book. He also noted that the 3.0 ft. level in June has been a successful target. He commended the USACE for the efforts and progress it has made in regulation over the past several years. Mr. Allis responded to the inquiry about the Facts Book. The book is under final revisions and will be released shortly. A copy will be available on the website as well. Dr. Lilienfeld asked for several copies to be sent to her for use in the classroom.

Rob Elliot from the Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS) asked if there was a minimum flow the USACE attempts to maintain in the Lower Fox River during the May fill up. Mr. Allis responded that the USACE will do their best to provide a constant flow in the Lower Fox River. However, the regulation strategy is only a guide; the lake is typically regulated in response to weather conditions. Mr. Allis asked Mr. Elliot to provide an update to the sturgeon spawn this year. Mr. Elliot stated that there is nothing to report at the DePere dam, but the sturgeon

have started to spawn on the Wolf River. He anticipated the sturgeon spawn at DePere is only a week or so away. The spawn is occurring much earlier this year. Typically, the spawn occurs in the last week of April or the first week of May. Once the spawn begins, it will take approximately 3 weeks for the larvae to hatch and travel downstream. Mr. Elliot asked that a minimum constant flow of 2,500 cfs – 3,000 cfs be maintained to allow for a successful spawn.

Dr. Lilienfeld asked Mr. Allis to explain what Oshkosh Datum is. Oshkosh datum is a local datum established in the area and has been used to describe the water levels on Lake Winnebago for years. Mr. Allis explained that Oshkosh Datum is a reference point which is locally used to describe elevations. It is only a reference point, not the depth of water in Lake Winnebago. He further explained that there are several datums used by surveyors and engineers such as the International Great Lakes Datum of 1985 (IGLD 1985), IGLD 1955, the National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD 1929), etc.

9. Additional Announcements

Mr. Allis provided his contact information and the website address for the Lake Winnebago homepage on the USACE website.

Mr. Allis adjourned the call at approximately 1:45 CDT.

Participants:

USACE: Mike O'Bryan, Marie Strum, John Allis, Jim Bonetti, Bob Stanick, Dave Haefs, Mike Stencil, Melissa Kropfreiter, Tim Smith, Renee Thomas.

Other Agencies:

Art Techlow – Wisconsin DNR
Mike Pedersen – Kaukauna Utilities
Rob Elliott – U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Brian Hahn – NWS
Frank Krueger – Neenah Paper

Citizens and Groups:

Bill Hitchcock – Windpoint Harbor
Corey Mielke – Boating on Lake Winnebago
Dave Hersch – Property Owner
Shawn O'Connell – Pioneer Marina Oshkosh
Dr. Amy Lilienfeld – University of Wisconsin Fox Valley Dept. of Geography
Mark Radl – Oshkosh
Randy Kroll – High Cliff Harbor