Gmail

Hans Rasmussen <smithfieldceo@gmail.com>

Fw: Comments on Watershed Management Plan

1 message

Shoemaker, Stephen Paul <sshoemak@fas.harvard.edu>
To: "smithfieldceo@gmail.com" <smithfieldceo@gmail.com>

Wed, Jul 31, 2024 at 9:39 AM

Hello Hans,

Per your request this morning on the phone, I am forwarding you a copy of the deliberately polite email that I sent to the NPA on 15 September 2023, regarding the harmfully high lake levels in North Pond.

I did not receive any response from them, which was troubling to me.

Kindly,
Stephen

From: Shoemaker, Stephen Paul
Sent: Friday, September 15, 2023 3:21 PM
To: northpondmaine@gmail.com <northpondmaine@gmail.com>
Subject: Comments on Watershed Management Plan

Greetings NPA Board Members,

I would first like to express my gratitude to the Board for all the work that went into the creation of this substantive draft plan.

I would also like to apologize on behalf of certain lake owners who I suspect will not express appropriate appreciation for the massive effort put forth by Board members to create this document. Based on past observation, I suspect that some people will react quite strongly to this proposal, and my fear is that Board members will feel unappreciated--because some comments may be presented rudely.

Indeed, I would normally hesitate to express my views, when others have rolled up their sleeves and done hard work—but you have specifically requested comments, so I feel compelled to share a few thoughts.

The proposal as set forth should be commended for its multivalent thinking. You do address a number of relevant variables in this draft. However, I think that one significant variable has been overlooked.

According to a state website addressing algae blooms in lakes, the first step in combatting an ongoing algae issue is to reduce soil erosion. https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/lakes/algalbloom.html

In most lakes, the focus on reducing erosion would mean considering buffer zones, planting vegetation, looking at roads and driveways, etc.

On North Pond, our situation is somewhat different. We have a man-made erosion problem.

When the dam was installed in the mid-1980's, the lake level was raised significantly. My family has been on North Pond every summer since the 1950's. Our family photos from many decades show a dry band of shoreline with approximately 8-10 feet between the water and the soft dirt where trees and vegetation grow at our camp. After the dam was installed, that dry shore area disappeared, and the water was coming right up to the soft dirt.

I currently own three properties on the Pond. Each one is facing serious erosion issues. On one property, a 100-year-old tree (which was now located on the water's edge—but used to be @ 8 feet away from the water) recently fell over. When the tree man looked under that tree, where the water now laps at the earth surrounding the roots, he explained that erosion from waves is what washed away the root structure.

On another property, I have lost almost 2 foot of earth between the house and the lake in recent years.

On yet another property, with the very high lake level late this spring, we lost almost a foot of beach.

I realize this is anecdotal evidence, but another website from the State of Maine warns about the dangers of erosion in relation to raising the level of a lake. It specifically indicates that "it is usually best not to alter management significantly", and mentions that the use of dams can "significantly increase" erosion.

This "significant" change happened on North Pond back in 1985, and we continue to feel the effects of it decades later with ongoing erosion—as the opening sentence of the below quotation indicates.

(from: https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/lakes/waterlevel.html)

How long does it usually take to re-establish a stable shoreline when the water level has been raised or lowered?

Depending on the above, a stretch of shoreline can take many decades to re-establish a stable configuration after it begins eroding. This can be true even if there is no change in water level regime. Even lake shores which appear to be stable are often slowly eroding, and careful observation will reveal small areas of bank which are bare of plants or have exposed tree roots. This process has been significantly increased on many of the hundreds of lakes which have dams and extensive shoreline development or alterations even where these factors have been in place since early in this century. Unless it is obvious that water level management changes will reduce the frequency of water contact or ice damage to sensitive shoreline, it is usually best not to alter the management significantly. (from: https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/lakes/waterlevel.html)

The present NPA website only discusses the role of the dam in terms of considering a "drawdown" (a radical 6 ft plus temporary drop in level, which can work only in limited situations). However, the website does not address the situation specific to North Pond, where the lake level was significantly raised with the installation of the dam, promoting ongoing erosion issues. As the above quote notes, the addition of a dam should only be considered if it "will reduce the frequency of water contact", which is the exact opposite of what happened when our dam raised the lake level.

In my humble estimation, the Alum treatment plan addresses the symptom, rather than the cause. It is akin to noticing that you are suddenly standing in a puddle of gas when filling up your car, and you quickly reach for the bucket of chemical sand that many stations keep handy to clean up spills. That sand will clean up a spill, but it will not be effective unless you first turn off the spewing gas hose that has caused the problem.

I know that the lake level has been an ongoing point of discussion for many decades, but there seems to be cogent evidence that raising the level of the lake back in 1985 may be a significant variable worthy of consideration when pondering how to address our algae problems.

Again, I do wish to express my most sincere gratitude for your efforts on behalf of all of us, and I hope that my comments will not offend you.

Kindly, Stephen Shoemaker