

## **Lake Winnebago 2008 Winter Drawdown Conference Call Minutes**

**Introduction:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps)(USACE), Detroit District held its annual Lake Winnebago drawdown conference call on January 9, 2008. Mr. John Allis, Chief of the Watershed Hydrology Branch for the Detroit District USACE, opened the meeting at approximately 9:30am (C.S.T.), with a roll-call of the attendees. Approximately 10 agencies/users and 55 interested parties participated.

**Presentation of Agenda:** Mr. Allis began the meeting by presenting the conference call agenda. This included a discussion on the basin's current and expected winter conditions, drawdown timing and extent, and an open discussion.

**Basin Conditions and Significant Events:** Mr. Allis stated that the 2.2 ft. (OD) drawdown target level agreed to at the October regulation meeting was to avoid ice-shove damage to the structures located along the northern shores of Lake Winnebago. He also summarized Lake Winnebago regulation activities since the regulation meeting in October 2007.

Mr. Allis reported that November was a dry month without any significant rainfall events. The month of December was also uneventful except for a few small storms in late December that caused a small rise in lake level. He said Lake Winnebago had a complete ice cover by December 11. At that time, it was decided to hold the lake level steady at 2.2 ft. (OD). Beginning on Sunday, January 6, 2008, the basin had received about 1-inch of rain over a three day period. This prompted the Fox River Sub-Office (FRSO) to open several tainter gates at both dams to accommodate the increased supply of water to Lake Winnebago and maintain levels at the desired threshold. As of January 9, 2008, the level of Lake Winnebago was 2.30 ft. (OD) with outflows measured at Appleton near 6,000 cfs and upriver supplies, as reported by the River Forecast Center in Chanhassen, MN near 4,300 cfs.

Mr. Arthur Techlow, from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), is the USACE's primary contact for basin ice conditions during the winter months. He reported that Lake Winnebago was ice-covered with thicknesses ranging from 10 to 13-inches, while the upriver areas had ice thicknesses ranging from 8 to 18-inches. In addition, he said most of the existing snow-pack was gone. The small tributaries and drainage ditches in the basin were running full due to the recent rainfall and were expected to drain off fields shortly.

Mr. Robert Stanick, Chief of the FRSO, reported that since the October regulation meeting the Lower Fox River hydro-users have been running full and are working together with the FRSO to accommodate numerous contract operations being conducted along the river. The Lower Fox River was ice-free at the time of the meeting.

**Expected Conditions:** Mr. Brian Hahn from the National Weather Service also reported the lack of snow-pack over the basin was due to the recent warm temperatures and rainfall events. He stated the only significant snow in the basin was about two inches near the headwaters of the Wolf River in Langlade, Forest and Oneida counties. He also stated that the basin's short-term 6-10 day and the longer-term (8-14 day) and 3-month

temperature and precipitation forecast would be near normal. The Lake Winnebago area frost line was wiped out by the recent warming and rainfall events.

**Proposed Strategy:** Mr. Allis stated the USACE current plan of action would be to gradually draw down the level of Lake Winnebago to the crest of the Menasha Dam to 1.68 ft. (OD) by the end of February 2008. Outflows about 800 cfs greater than supplies will be experienced along the Lower Fox River over the next few months in an effort by the USACE to achieve this target level. After the recent rainfall and resulting supplies have moved through the basin, the lake level drawdown would begin. He stated that the USACE will post a notice on its website next week announcing the drawdown. The USACE plans to hold the level of Lake Winnebago steady at or near 1.68 ft. (OD) until the ice starts to break up in the spring. The USACE and WDNR will closely monitor basin conditions during this time and make appropriate adjustments as needed to meet our target goals.

**Open Discussion:** Numerous property owners and agency representatives voiced their concerns on the proposed drawdown for this winter. Their various comments and the USACE responses are as follows:

1. Mr. Jack Couillard, a property owner on the north shore of Lake Winnebago was dissatisfied with the 2.2 ft. (OD) target level. He said that over the past 2-3 years when the USACE had drawn the level to near 2.5 ft., ice shoves had blown ashore and caused damage to his permanent boat dock. Mr. Couillard suggested drawing the lake level down even further, to the elevation of the existing off-shore sand bars. He believed that this would protect his property from the ice shoves. Ms. Marie Strum, Assistant Chief of the Engineering and Technical Services Division, responded by stating that over the past few years, the ice has formed in early December due to the seasonally colder temperatures. Above normal temperatures later in December caused some of the ice to melt which has contributed to the damage caused by the ice shoves. This is an unusual event and could not have been prevented. Mr. Couillard also suggested starting the drawdown before October. However, both Ms. Strum and Art Techlow of the WDNR responded by saying the early drawdown would impact the boating season which usually runs through the beginning of October.

2. Another Lake Winnebago property owner expressed his concerns about the changes he had observed in Lake Winnebago water levels over the past 9 years. Ms. Strum replied that the USACE has been regulating Lake Winnebago since the 1980's. No significant changes had been made to our regulating objectives during this time. Only a minor reduction in the winter drawdown from 2.5 ft. (OD) to 2.2 ft. (OD) was initiated at this year's regulation meeting in October 2007. She further explained that the main objective for the drawdown is to reduce downstream flooding during spring snowmelt and floods. The lake is drawn down in the winter in anticipation of spring rains and snowmelt. The lake's storage capacity allows it to be used as a flood control measure to reduce the incidence of downstream floods.

3. Mr. Pat O'Brien an upriver lakes property owner stated that the proposed drawdown to 2.2 ft. (OD) negatively impacts levels upstream of Lake Winnebago. He believes that the drawdown has an adverse impact on recreational boating, fishing and other recreational related activities on the upriver lakes. Mr. O'Brien stated that the environment, fish habitat and fish species must be protected and suggested that there be no drawdown. He suggested further discussion on his proposal on drawdown for the next regulation meeting. Ms. Strum replied that the USACE- Detroit regulates Lake Winnebago water levels on a daily basis, attempting to balance the needs of all competing users of the basin's water resources. The USACE attempts to address all concerns through frequent communication and discussions at our annual regulation meeting.

4. Mr. Gary Schumacher, home owner along the SW shore of Lake Winnebago, concurred with the concerns expressed by the other home-owners. He stated that the current climate now and through late winter impacts the movement of the lake ice. He stated that regardless of the level the lake is draw down to, the ice will move since it is not frozen to the lake bottom.

5. Mr. Dan Rudebeck of the Lake Sportsman's Club concurred with the concerns on the impacts of low water levels on vegetation and recreational benefits expressed by the other property owners.

6. Mr. Bill Hitchcock stated that low water levels have an impact on the fish habitat. If the levels are drawn down too low, the fish hatchery will be affected.

7. Ms. Donna Laurie, Winnebago County Supervisor, was concerned about the drinking water if the lake was drawn down too low. Ms. Strum stated that there have been no prior warnings or concerns regarding the withdrawal of water from the lake by the water users since the USACE has been regulating Lake Winnebago.

8. Another property owner along the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago questioned the navigation season water level. Ms. Strum stated that since the USACE-Detroit District has been regulating Lake Winnebago since the early 1980's, the target level has been 3.0 ft. (OD). However, drought conditions and evaporation experienced as recently as last year has prevented the USACE from meeting the lake level objectives and maintaining it at the required 3.0 ft. (OD) navigation season water level for the boating season.

9. Mr. Skip Palermo of the Appleton Yacht Club expressed his concerns about the algae blooms that blossomed this past summer. It was an unhealthy situation along much of the Lake Winnebago shoreline.

Art Techlow responded by stating that the algae flourished due to inadequate flow, wind and lack of precipitation during the summer months. It was unfortunate that this occurred this past summer but there was nothing that could have been done given the existing conditions.

After a review of the drawdown objectives, Mr. Allis ended the conference call and thanked participants for their feedback. Participants were encouraged to visit the Corps' website for much information on water levels, flows, and meeting notices. The website address is: [www.lre.usace.army.mil/glhh/winnebago](http://www.lre.usace.army.mil/glhh/winnebago).