

Phosphorus Removal Working Well on Lake: Commission

By **Jane Primerano, Senior Contributing Writer** - November 14, 2020

A grant received by Mount Arlington for beach restoration and stream maintenance can serve as a match for more Watershed Improvement Planning (WIP) money, Fred Lubnow of PrincetonHydro told the Lake Hopatcong Commission on Monday, November 9.

PrincetonHydro completed the WIP and submitted it to both the commission and the Highlands Council, Lubnow said. He is going to meet with Mount Arlington's project engineer after the Council looks over the proposed design and engineering.

Lubnow had some good news to report to the commission.

The biochar installed in streams leading into the lake accomplished 50% removal and the material installed in Memorial Pond, Duck Pond, and Ashley Cove removed between 80% and 90%.

Lubnow said biochar works better in still water, as the program last summer proved. The biochar in streams was installed at the point where the streams enter the lake and the water moves more slowly than in the bulk of the stream. But even 50% removal is considered good, he said. Even the three-chambered baffle boxes in many storm drains only remove about 30% or 40%, Lubnow explained.

The question remains how often the biochar material must be replaced. John Paul Bell from PrincetonHydro suggested flipping the chambers next year to see if that prolongs the material's usefulness.

Lubnow will present the findings of the phosphorus abatement projects to the NJ Water Association Resource Conference and the North American Lake Management Association Conference. He said Lake Hopatcong is ahead of other bodies of water in phosphorus removal so he is sharing the database with other lake communities.

He told the commission the WIP was paid for by the Highlands Council. The state Department of Environmental Protection gave its blessing to all the projects. A WIP increases funding opportunities.

The WIP mentions Jefferson is looking into a sewer feasibility study, Lubnow said.

Jefferson Mayor Eric Wilsusen said the township received a \$100,000 grant to update the 2002 sewer plan.

PrincetonHydro will also be working with the commission's land use subcommittee. Lubnow said the firm has an engineer and an environmental scientist familiar with site plan issues.

Subcommittee Chair Robert Tessier, the state Department of Community Affairs representative to the commission, said the commission's planning consultant, Ken Nelson, is working on a procedure for reviewing site plans. Tessier said the land use committee is working on a procedure to allow its members to see land use applications at the same time they go to the professionals hired by the land use boards in the four towns. This will enable the land use committee to review the applications and make any recommendations to the municipal board in a timely manner.

Drawdown

In other business, Commissioner Fred Steinbaum presented a proposal for the annual drawdown of the lake.

Steinbaum, who has lived on the lake since the 1940s, has worked on lake level proposals since 2015, he reminded the commission.

The lake is lowered by 60 inches every five years to accommodate repairs to docks and other structures. The annual drawdown was reduced from 26 inches to 22 inches on the recommendation of the Citizens Advisory Council. During one drought year, the lake didn't recover properly from the 26-inch drawdown. Steinbaum would like to see an 18-inch drop. The DEP rejected a recommendation for a 16-inch drawdown a few years ago.

Commission Vice President Dan McCarthy reminded the commission annual drawdowns were originally 36 inches and then 30 inches. He said a change to 18 inches may not be received well by the state.

He noted the annual drawdown is performed to protect docks and other structures and also to prevent downstream flooding.

Steinbaum said the DEP rejected 16 inches because of the danger of high water damage to two buildings in Stanhope, downstream on the Musconetcong River. He said that's why he suggested 18 inches instead. He said that would be low enough to prevent ice damage when a large ice floe breaks off and hits a dock.

DEP representative to the commission Josh Osowski said the next CAC meeting is next week and will discuss the lake level.

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