

TSPOA: Community Conversations & Updates

August 2021; Issue 1.1

What's Up with the Pond? Action Plan 2021

In October of 2020 TSPOA hired a lake manager, Northeast Aquatic Research (NEAR). In January of 2021, NEAR submitted an Action Plan to TSPOA for the monitoring and management of the cattail growth that appeared in the north/northeastern section of Robinson Pond during the extended drawdown in 2020. The full action plan can be found on the TSPOA website at <http://bit.ly/LakeActionPlan2021>. Since then, the TSPOA Board, Lake Committee, and Maintenance Staff have been coordinating with NEAR in executing this plan. The TSPOA Communications Committee sat down for a conversation with TSPOA Lake Committee Chair Lois Lovisolo to get an update about progress on the action plan and related lake matters. We spoke to a few other board members and staff to confirm some details, and the result is this first in a series of TSPOA Briefings about the lake.

We appreciate the TSPOA Board hiring a lake manager last year to address the lake challenges. Can you describe how NEAR is working with TSPOA?

First some context: NEAR is not the first Lake Manager that TSPOA has worked with. For years we partnered with Allied Biological, later acquired by Solitude, in applying chemical treatments to successfully manage invasive vegetation growth in Robinson Pond, with full support of the DEC. Around 2017 there were some staffing changes at the DEC. One of their first actions was to expand our chemical treatment notification requirements, and an organic farm along the Roeliff Jansen Kill responded to that notice by informing the DEC that they objected. The DEC subsequently began denying our permit applications for all chemical treatments. TSPOA sought legal advice at the time but little could be done, and Solitude was unable to successfully advocate on our behalf with the DEC. Therefore, the only recommendation for managing invasive growth was to do our own weed harvesting, combined with periodic lake drawdowns to kill vegetation over the winter. To do that we did not need to continue working with Solitude and ended the relationship.

Fast forward to 2020: We experienced unprecedented cattail growth in the north/northeast section of Robinson Pond (Section 6 – see map on page 5) as a result of the extended drawdown required for the dam repair project. The cattails caused real concern for homeowners living in this area. The Board therefore hired NEAR to address this immediate challenge as well as longer-term care of the lake. We are so far pleased with the new relationship.

Alejandro (AJ) Reyes is our Lake Manager from NEAR. Steve Coleman from the Lake Committee is on point to convey questions and concerns from the Board and other individuals to AJ. Neither the board nor maintenance staff work directly with NEAR. AJ does communicate with the TSPOA office when he or a member of the NEAR team is on the premises monitoring and conducting research.

NEAR is fulfilling the terms of their agreement with us and regularly reports its findings to the Lake Committee. The season will end in October at which time NEAR will deliver to the Board a comprehensive report about the state of the lake, along with recommendations for 2022.

[We have reviewed the January 21, 2021 Action Plan. Are there any progress updates on mechanical harvesting in section 6?](#)

The weed harvester has been cutting the regrowth of cattails that were cut last season in Sections 5 & 6 to keep the regrowth submerged below the water surface. Bear in mind harvesters are not designed for cutting cattails so the process is tough on the equipment. We are working as carefully and productively as we can, but it has been slow going. Plans for cutting remaining cattails from last season in Section 6 are currently under discussion with Maintenance. Also, weed harvesting is now highly regulated, so the staff has to monitor progress and submit all sorts of reports to the DEC, which also takes time.

We were hoping to have the smaller weed harvester operational this year. This machine has always been problematic, and we also pushed it beyond capacity a few years ago when the main weed harvester had to be taken out of rotation for major repairs. The company that sold us the smaller machine went out of business so getting them to repair it was no longer an option. Therefore in 2020 TSPOA engaged the weed harvester company Alpha Boats to rebuild the machine. However, there have been major shipping delays in receiving parts, due to the pandemic. Most of them finally arrived last week, but the hydraulic parts coming from China still won't arrive for another few weeks.

We are fortunate to have had so much rain this year. Normal water levels are expected to weaken and essentially drown the cut cattail plants, and the higher water levels brought on by significant rainfall only help the process. Please note, however, that while our goal is to always keep the water levels at optimal levels for lake health, at times levels must be manually lowered when the potential for flooding is high. Operating the dam is a constant balancing act between maintaining the health of the lake and ensuring the safety of the community.

Some homeowners have expressed concern about all the decomposing debris building up from the harvesting. We have therefore acquired a "boom" to collect and clear this debris. We are in the process of testing the boom and determining the equipment and staffing needs to support its use.

Will the weed harvester be solely dedicated to section 6 this season?

The priority for harvesting is to maintain navigational routes throughout the entire lake. Cleaning beaches and boat launches, which may be composed of cutting, skimming or “blowing out” the area, have priority. Section 6 is receiving a higher degree of attention than in the past due to the objective of keeping previously cut cattails underwater and keeping a navigational route open. This is the overall plan, but harvesting is very fluid and conditions such as wind, currents, volume of water activity in an area, and the presence of invasive vegetation above or near the water level all dictate where harvesting occurs each day. Also, cutting is the focus in the beginning of the week while skimming is a higher priority before the weekend to provide for the least amount of floating debris as possible.

Recently, we received confirmation from the DEC that our current permit will allow for certain sections of uncut cattails in section 6 to be cut.

What is the status of the hydroraking permit to create the 50’ channel through the cattails in section 6? Also, will individual homeowners be able to do hydroraking of their own properties?

Good news: The permit for hydroraking of the channel was finally issued two weeks ago and work can begin in September! Our thanks go to Lake Committee volunteer Sandra Baptie and Association Manager Susan Newland who worked hard to get it approved. TSPOA budgeted \$50K for this project.

As for hydroraking of individual properties, Sandra is currently collecting names of homeowners who want to take advantage of the service, and will advise them how to work with the hydroraking company. As previously noted at the Community meeting, any hydroraking costs for individual properties, including permits, are the sole responsibility of the homeowners.

Is there any way we can speed up the permitting process so all these important activities for the lake start earlier?

In recent years the process has been frustrating as most requests for permits were denied by DEC, and the few that were approved were for some reason dragged out, in some cases too late in the season for us to even use. There appears to be a slight change in attitude at the DEC lately – last year they actually approved a chemical treatment for duckweed – but unfortunately with the long drawdown we were unable to take advantage of it.

We have one weed harvesting permit which includes both skimming and cutting. Skimming may begin in May but cutting may not begin until June 15th. These dates are firm for the harvesting permit and are based on the spawning of a variety of fish species. The DEC is very thorough in understanding what ecology systems are impacted by what we do and their first objective is to protect those systems. Our permit applications must demonstrate we are not negatively impacting an eco-system. Usually follow up questions from the DEC are to address these concerns. The Lake Manager will provide us with current documented data that will help us in our permitting process. Our plan is to file any necessary permit applications in early January, so we receive any required permits by the start of the season. We will stay in close touch with the DEC to ensure there are no unnecessary delays.

We understand there is review of the dam underway to address some problems revealed by last year's project. Do you know if any of that potential work will negatively affect the progress being made in section 6?

A proposal has been submitted for remediation of the newly discovered problems at the dam, and will be reviewed by the board later this month. Our understanding is that lake levels will not need to be lowered for this work to proceed, so if approved, there should be no impact on our efforts to improve the lake.

We heard someone mention at a recent meeting that a member was told by a contact at the DEC that we might be allowed to dredge? Is that even possible?

We heard that, too, but TSPOA hasn't confirmed that with the DEC. The Lake Committee has been tasked with creating a plan for dredging that will meet TSPOA needs and try to satisfy DEC requirements.

Can we still access Lake Committee meetings via Zoom after in-person meetings start up again?

Lake Committee meetings are to be in person, but Zoom calls are possible at the discretion of the Committee or Chairman. All members are welcome to attend, and the meeting schedule is on the TSPOA calendar on the website at <https://taconicshores.org/community>.

Is there anything individual homeowners can do to help the situation?

There are things that all of us can do to meet the challenge of keeping the lake healthy. All property owners are responsible for clearing the area of the lake up to 20 feet from the end of their individual property. If you're not physically able to do this yourself, you can hire someone to do it or if you have significant vegetation growth, take advantage of the hydroraking opportunity. Also, remember to follow homeowner guidelines for keeping the lake healthy, at <https://taconicshores.org/lake>.

Some members have expressed an interest in donating funds specifically towards improving the lake, and they are welcome to do so. However, at present such contributions are not tax deductible. We are exploring if a charitable organization for the lake can be created under the IRS code, 501 (C)(3), in which case these donations would be deductible. However, it is not yet clear if this is even doable.

If you are interested in helping improve the lake, please consider volunteering for special projects like "water chestnut pulling" outings. These are fun ways to get involved, help the lake, enjoy the great outdoors, AND meet your neighbors! Keep an eye out for announcements.

For now, anyone with questions or ideas about the lake should send an email to office@taconicshores.com and it will be forwarded to the relevant Board member. Again, all are encouraged to check out the website and/or attend Lake Committee meetings to find out more.

Thank you very much for your time in sharing these updates. We look forward to chatting with you again next month.

Disclaimer: Please note this briefing is meant to be a supplement to – but not a substitute for – in-depth updates which are shared at Board, Community, and Lake Committee meetings or in posts on the TSPOA website <https://taconicshores.org/lake>.

Map: Robinson Pond with Sections

