



State of Wisconsin \ DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Jack King
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Subject: Response to your statement made at the July 14, 2005 work group meeting.

Dear Jack:

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on your testimony made at the July 14, 2005 work group meeting. I also want to thank you for providing me a copy of that document. At that time you stated that the Lakes Association is opposed at this time to any change in draw down, because up to now, the DNR has failed to give equal attention to several other important issues. I feel we have addressed these issues. I'm willing to discuss these with you further.

I am hoping to strike a balance between upstream and downstream interests with give and take on both sides to protect fish, wildlife and recreational values. I have presented a number of options, including a no change in draw down, to be considered. I believe these options are reasonable.

I would like to provide more clarification/explanation to the items raised in your statement.

1. The confirmed presence of spawning lake sturgeon in at least one area of the river below the dam.

The department has confirmed that segment of the Manitowish River below Highway 51 is a spawning site. Radio tagged fish have moved into the area periodically over the 10-15 years. We have collected eggs and milt from fish that have moved into the area in 1998. We have confirmed sightings of fish in 1983. As explained earlier correspondence, we are dealing with an older population of fish with low numbers (Have marked 107 fish including some stocked juvenile fish as well as adults) and have not had successful reproduction in recent years. We have been successful in stocking sturgeon in 1994, 1998 and 2005. These fish show good survival. The fish stocked in 1994 will soon be reaching spawning age; there fore we feel it is important to establish a spring flow regime that meets sturgeon habitat requirements. It is also suspected that sturgeon may use a site further downstream near the wayside (off highway 51).

2. The absence of empirical evidence that flow rate is the sole reason for lack of sturgeon spawning.

The evidence shows that over the last 30 years (probably more) flow rates have been reduced during the critical month of May because the chain is being filled. We have data to prove this. Many of our sturgeon experts around the state point to this as a major factor. The modeling work that the department conducted confirmed the need for a higher spring flow based on sturgeon habitat

suitability curves. We agree that other factors play a role such as dams (prevent migration), low numbers of fish as well as predation. These should not prevent us from moving forward. This is not a short-term fix, but will take some time to evaluate success.

3. The expectations of homeowners and prospective buyers' after 65 years of consistent yearly dam operation.

My sense is that you feel there should be no changes because people expect the dam to be operated the way it always has (over the last 65 years). I do not believe this should be used as a selling point for prospective buyers. Things change. As indicated in my July 14, 2005 presentation, the dam has not been operated consistently since 1939. Dam operation has changed over time. It is not currently being operated as spelled out in the 1939 order.

The original intent of the 1939 order and operation of the dam was to provide uniform flow for log driving. Obviously, this is not the purpose now. As an agency we are required to review operations and to protect the public interest which includes human uses above and below the dam and aquatic life above and below the dam in addition to navigation.

4. Predation.

Some egg predation probably occurs (even by adult sturgeon). Egg predation occurs in rivers with self-sustaining sturgeon populations and will not adversely affect sustainability if adequate habitat and flows exist for reproduction and recruitment. How significant is it in the Manitowish River, I don't know. Even if it was, this should not prevent us from moving forward. Our intent is to gradually build up the adult sturgeon population over time and we feel that spring flow goals are a big piece of the puzzle.

I have contacted a couple of Lake Sturgeon experts (Ron Bruch and Nancy Auer (Michigan Tech) to see if I could find more information on what fish species prey on sturgeon eggs. Unfortunately there is very little information on this subject other than it probably occurs. What kind of information were you looking for?

5. Stream reconfiguration.

We have discussed this issue in the past. When river flow gets low (< 50 cfs) there is a navigation bottleneck downstream of the highway 51 spawning site (below the Circle Lilly Creek tributary). In this area the substrate consists entirely of sand. Conducting any stream modification in this area would be short lived because of the lower gradient and shifting sands which would likely refill the channel. At the highway 51 site, the river gradient is higher and substrate is primarily boulder/cobble. Suitable habitat exists given suitable flows. I assume you are suggesting that we deepen the spawning site mechanically or create habitat in lieu of changing any operations at the dam?

6. Alternative scenarios.

The alternative you bring up, stocking sturgeon fingerlings in the Manitowish River above Island Lake has some merit. Our immediate priority is to sustain the existing population of fish in the Turtle Flambeau Flowage and the Manitowish River downstream of the Rest Lake Dam. Our goal is to restore a self sustaining population through river flow regulation and stocking. In the future we will consider the feasibility of stocking sturgeon in the river above Islands Lake.

This project did not have a “predetermined plan” as you allege. I believe the minutes of many meetings prove it. And finally I have never stated that the consistency of dam operation over the last 65 years is the reason to propose changes.

I hope this clarifies the department’s position. I will proceed with fine tuning the options laid out at the July 14th meeting unless you would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely

Jim Kreitlow
Water Program Supervisor/Project Coordinator