

Lake Holcombe water fluctuations ending

Shoreline residents complained of poor recreation conditions

By Joe Knight
Leader-Telegram staff

Following complaints from lake residents, Xcel Energy has stopped raising and lowering water levels on Lake Holcombe, a program that was intended to flush oxygen-rich waters into the lake's back bays to prevent winter fish kills.

The water fluctuations began on Jan. 10, when the lake level was raised 3 feet, and then lowered over the course of a week.

Xcel officials discontinued the lake-level al-

terations after hearing from lake residents who said the practice led to a slushy ice surface. State Department of Natural Resources officials agreed with ending changes to the water level.

"We haven't had any fish kills for so many years that it didn't appear to have any value," said Tim Kivi, president of the Lake Holcombe Improvement Association.

With low river flows during the past several years, Xcel hasn't had enough water to raise and

lower lake levels, Kivi said, but that practice hasn't led to higher fish kills.

"The consensus was that there really wasn't any reason to do it, and the DNR agreed," he said.

Once the fluctuations, or "bouncing," began, the ice bordering the shoreline became slushy from water being forced through it. That kept cars off the lake and made it difficult for snowmobiles to access the ice, Kivi said.

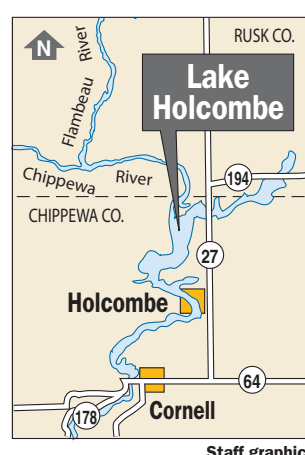
The DNR agreed to discontinue water-level alterations with the understanding that for the next three years lake association volunteers will record fish kill numbers in the

lake's bays.

Rob Olson of Xcel Energy questions the wisdom of discontinuing lake level alterations, a practice that dates to the 1970s. He worries more fish will die without added water.

The lake has back bays that are partially isolated from the main part of the lake, some of which are important rearing areas for small fish, Olson said. As the winter progresses, the decomposition of plant material in the bays can lower dissolved oxygen levels to points that are stressful to fish.

In the 1990s, when the Holcombe dam was up for relicensing, Northern States Power Co. (which



Staff graphic

later became Xcel) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducted extensive studies of how different lake fluctuations affected oxygen levels in Lake Holcombe's back

bays in winter. They settled on the 3-foot fluctuation over one week as the best system to provide adequate oxygen levels to those areas.

"There was a lot of time and effort that went into the studies," Olson said.

Olson said past winter lake-level changes led to slushy ice along the lake's edge, but people still were able to use the lake for snowmobiling and ice fishing.

"One of the concerns is that it creates unsafe ice, but we've been doing this for 30 years," he said.

Knight can be reached at 715-830-5835, 800-236-7077 or joe.knight@ecpc.com.

Trust/Gauger tried to pay back funds

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that is common in non-profit administrator ranks. He said he made the products available to all the staff, though they rarely took advantage of them. He said the more than \$13,000 in expenses for the health products was for preventative health.

In 2008, Gauger charged \$3,000 to the corporate credit card for a bicycle touring company. Prohaska said land trust board members recalled Gauger telling them he would be on sabbatical to participate in a bike ride

across America. Gauger justified the expense because the agency was paying for half of his tour. He also charged airfare from Minneapolis to San Diego to begin the trip and airfare from Savannah, Ga., to Minneapolis when the trip ended. He also charged a round-trip airfare from Minneapolis to Savannah for Kadlec to attend festivities at the end of the bike tour.

During the course of the bike ride, Gauger charged more than \$600 in food and expenses to the land trust and over \$1,600 in hotel stays at the end of

the trip.

Gauger also bought a GPS unit that was a sophisticated bicycling computer.

Gauger met with police in November and said he had delivered a check for \$25,000 to the land trust board president to cover a portion of the unauthorized credit card purchases. He later made another \$5,000 payment to the land trust.

Former board member Scott Nicastrò said he left the board of directors because of frustration over Gauger's financial accounting process and

that Gauger continually obstructed the efforts of the board to monitor the organization's financial situation.

Kadlec told police she was overwhelmed by her job and did not re-view Gauger's credit card charges before paying them. She then blamed the board of directors for failing to provide proper oversight of the agency.

She said she resigned her position when she learned there would be staff and pay cuts.

Powers can be reached at 715-556-9018 or pamela.powers@ecpc.com.

Liquor/Bar manager accused of obstruction

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Marjorie Volbrecht to Dwayne Lambert, who is manager of the bar.

City police Capt. John Liddell wrote a letter to the council, saying that the Police Department is referring a case to the Chippewa County district attorney's office for possible charges against Lambert for allegedly destroying documents and obstructing an officer.

Liddell said the police requested surveillance

tapes but Lambert declined to turn them over within five days of the request, and the tapes now have been erased.

"I can't tell you the last time we had someone not turn (tapes) over," Liddell said.

Lambert said Tuesday was the first time he had heard of the allegations.

An annual request for an outdoor beer garden at the near south side tavern also was tabled.

Vetter can be reached at 715-723-0303 or chris.vetter@ecpc.com.

In Brief

Man gets prison for drug charge

MADISON — Chief U.S. District Judge William M. Conley on Friday sentenced a Chippewa Falls man to 130 months in prison on a federal drug charge.

Richard R. Koput, 45, was charged with possession of pseudoephedrine with the intent to manufacture methamphetamine. He pleaded guilty to the charge Nov. 8.

Koput admitted to making methamphetamine in the Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire area from June 2009 until his arrest last April, according to a news release from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Koput also has an extensive criminal history and created havoc in the area, both of which were taken into account during sentencing. In addition to his prison time, Koput will put on supervised release for three years once out of prison.

Man sentenced for check forgery

A Chippewa Falls man will spend three years in prison for issuing more than \$4,000 in forged checks.

Ryan M. Sturz, 29, pleaded guilty recently in Eau Claire County Court to a felony count of fraud against a financial institution.

Judge Lisa Stark ordered Sturz to spend three years on extended supervision following his release from prison.

According to the crimi-

nal complaint: Sturz deposited two forged checks from an Associated Bank bank account into a Wells Fargo account.

After depositing the forged checks, Sturz made a \$3,000 withdrawal from the Wells Fargo account, as well as a series of check card purchases and ATM withdrawals.

Video surveillance was taken of some of the withdrawals.

Sturz's sentence included a probation revocation for a felony conviction in 2009 for misappropriation of personal identifying information.

Sturz violated conditions of his probation in that case by writing the forged checks.

Marijuana sales bring prison time

An Eau Claire man will spend three years in prison for twice selling marijuana to a confidential police informant.

Adam A. Askland, 23, 1422 E. Clairemont Ave., pleaded no contest recently in Eau Claire County Court to a felony count of marijuana delivery.

Judge Michael Schumacher ordered Askland to spend two years on extended supervision following his release from prison. As conditions of supervision, Askland cannot drink alcohol or enter taverns.

According to the criminal complaint: Askland sold 8 grams of marijuana to the informant on June 11 at a Barland Street residence. He sold nearly 4 grams

of marijuana to the informant at the same residence on June 15.

Askland was prosecuted as a repeat offender. He was convicted of marijuana delivery in February 2009 in Eau Claire County.

Man imprisoned for violations

An Eau Claire man will spend three years in prison for violating conditions of his probation stemming from a 2008 felony conviction.

Chou C. Vang, 25, must spend two years on extended supervision following his release from prison. As a condition of supervision, Eau Claire County Judge Paul Lenz ordered Vang not to drink alcohol or have gang affiliations.

Vang was originally sentenced in September 2008 to four years of probation and six months in jail for possession of methamphetamine with intent to deliver.

According to court records, Vang violated terms of his probation by possessing a weapon, threatening to harm another person, possessing alcohol, taking out a loan without permission and possessing and using methamphetamine.

Tell us your Pack superstitions

Hey Packers fans, what steps will you take to help your team win Super Bowl XLV on Sunday?

Whether people truly believe in their power or not, many sports fans wear lucky clothing, re-

peat elaborate game-day rituals or follow other superstitions to bring luck to their team.

The Leader-Telegram would like to hear how you will help the Packers beat the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday. Contact special projects editor Eric Lindquist at eric.lindquist@ecpc.com or 715-833-9209 to be included in an upcoming story.

From staff reports

Standoff/Rifle found; no one was hurt

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canister in a window of the residence.

A loaded rifle was found in the residence, but no shots were fired and no one was injured.

Shewczyk is being prosecuted as a repeat offender. He was convicted of disorderly conduct in October 2009 and possession of marijuana in May and November 2007, all in Eau Claire County.

Holtz can be reached at 715-833-9207, 800-236-7077 or dan.holtz@ecpc.com.

Wahl/She plans to travel

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drug prevention, and foster better relationships between police and youth, Wahl said.

"I love kids, and I want to see them thrive," Wahl said. "So many of these initiatives have been prevention-based, and it's exciting to see that in a community."

Wahl, widow of long-

time local judge Eric Wahl — who died in 2007 — said she'll spend her retirement traveling. She's already planning a trip this year to Jamaica. She also said she wants to spend more time with family and focus on her painting hobby.

Bennett can be reached at 715-830-5832, 800-236-7077 or mclean.bennett@ecpc.com.

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