

Sunday, August 23, 2009

A real rain storm!

By Lynn Woolhouse
Staff Writer



LOCAL WEATHER RECORDER Leonard Fellman tracks weather and rainfall at his home in Big Lake. (Photos by Lynn Woolhouse)

Heavy rains showered over Big Lake Wednesday and Thursday as the lakes rose a total of three inches and local weather recorder Leonard Fellman reported a total of 3.5 inches of rainfall Thursday.

Using a cylinder gauge with a four inch mouth, Fellman records the weather daily and reports his findings to Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District.

"From 9 a.m. yesterday to 9 a.m. today, I topped out with a fraction over 3.5 inches," reported Fellman.

Resource Conservationist for Sherburne Soil and Water, Gina Hugo, says there are both positives and negatives with the sudden heavy rains.

"The positives include groundwater recharge, a deep satisfying drink for trees, and of course green lawns," she says.

Potential negatives include runoff to surface waters carrying nutrients, sediment and other pollutants, leaching of nutrients out of crop plant root zones and erosion in poorly vegetated areas.

Local potato farmer Mike Hayes says the rainfall does help improve irrigation, but the excessiveness can cause problems.

"It would be better if the rain had been spaced out over time," he says.



AREAS OF THE BIG LAKE INDUSTRIAL PARKING LOT were under more than six inches of water Wednesday as heavy rains flooded. Total rainfall through Friday morning was 4.25 inches. (Photo by Lynn Woolhouse)

As a result, heavy rains slow the potato harvest as rain had been spaced out over time," he says.

As a result, heavy rains slow the potato harvest as the fields are soaked, making it difficult for

farmers to run harvesters through the fields.

After Wednesday, Hayes reported two inches of rain in his Becker field and four inches in Big Lake.

"We waited until 9 a.m. today to dig some potatoes," Hayes said Thursday. "We went to a normally very sandy field and were able to dig some," he said.

Despite the muddy, soaked fields, local farmers also face another challenge, mold.

"Excessive rain is effecting the soy bean crop," says Hayes. "Any white mold spores that have been out there, with the moist, humid conditions, any mold in the fields will take a hold and kill the plants."

Hayes says a fare amount of crops are done for the season, but the rain will help the later season crops.

"If it doesn't rain any more tonight or tomorrow, we should be able to be back out to the fields tomorrow afternoon," he says.

Homeowners also faced challenges as heavy rains result with some flooded or damp basements.

Chuck Hultman of Big Lake Hardware Hank, reported they sold three sump pumps this week, along with sand tubes.

"Normally we sell sump pumps in the spring," he says. "But three, in the last couple of days, we usually don't do that this time of year," he says.

Precipitation totals for Sherburne County show an average of 2.71 inches in July and 3.85 inches in June.

Saturday, August 15, 2009

Milfoil, Erosion Control, Water Testing Lake group is busy with projects

By Jennifer Edwards
Staff Writer



THE BIG LAKE COMMUNITY LAKES ASSOCIATION BOARD (from left to right), are Sanford Smith, Ken Warner, Jane Ramuno, Gale Long, Robert Eddy, Jim Ridgeway and Scott Chapman. (Photo by Jennifer Edwards)



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The Big Lake Community Lakes Association (BLCLA), held their annual meeting at Russell's on the Lake Saturday.

President Jim Ridgeway welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Ken Warner, who will be president of the association for the coming year.

Other board members include Gale Jones, Sanford Smith, Robert Eddy, Bob Warner, Scott Chapman and Jane Ramuno.

Over 200 Minnesota lakes are infested with Eurasian milfoil, which originally came from Africa and was first noted in 1910.

The BLCLA was revived two years ago, when two or three patches of Eurasian milfoil were found in Big Lake. Before the end of the year, the number of patches had jumped to 28.

Prompt treatment, funded by BLCLA membership fees, the City of Big Lake and grants from the Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR), and Soil and Water Conservation, has slowed the spread of Eurasian milfoil, officials report.

This year, the spread of this invasive species, which forms dense mats and chokes the life out of native species, has been slowed dramatically. There are now 34 patches of this weed.

Curly leaf pondweed has also been discovered and treated. Other projects of the BLCLA have included over 100 pages of water samplings and reports from various points around the lakes to develop a data base, said Smith.

A property owners survey has been conducted and data shared with the city council.

Volunteers staffed a booth at the Big Lake Expo to share information with lake users.

A management plan for both lakes was submitted to the DNR in March, Smith reported.

"This is a prerequisite for most grants and application permits," Smith said. "Water samples are still being collected on a monthly basis."

The spread of invasive species is caused by human activity. A tiny thread of Eurasian milfoil leaf on a boat may go unnoticed by the boat's owner but spread like wildfire in a body of water.

Boat Check

A Coast Guard Auxiliary safety check was conducted at Lakeside Park May 30. Ten boats were inspected. Next year, the association hopes to have 50. No citations were issued. Passing the inspection can lead to lower insurance rates.

"Safety is our number one concern on the lakes," said Eddy. "Only 20% of boats pass the check on the first try. The recurring pass rate is 74%."

Coast guard officials look for things like the display of a boat's numbers, size, style and color contrast, registration, flotation devices, distress signals, horn or bell, navigation lights and overall condition, to name a few.

Stocking Walleye

Warner said the association has been working with the DNR to stock walleye in the lakes but their efforts have been defeated by the numbers of northerns present.

"If we could encourage the fishermen to keep the small northerns they catch we could increase the size of the pan fish," he said. "Perhaps we could have a fishing tournament for northerns only."

Shoreline Restoration

Shoreline restoration is another project which has taken up a great deal of the association's time over the past year, Ridgeway said.

"A pilot project on the Washington Avenue greenway has been completed and the Knaeble project by the point too. The shoreline has been planted in wave breakers (plants), with trees and roses on the sand," Ridgeway said.

"Seventy percent are still living. Water was hand-carried to keep them alive."

Ridgeway credited cooperation from Mark Basiletti of the Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation, which paid 75% of the costs of planting.

"I encourage property owners around the lakes to sign up with Mark for more assistance with their own projects," Ridgeway said. "There is no mowing, the plants filter runoff into the lakes. You can create rain gardens and help preserve the lakes for future generations."

There are four other private projects currently being worked on and more are planned for 2010, Ridgeway said, including applying for a grant for Crescent Street.

Don't Feed The Geese

The BLCLA is requesting the city council pass an ordinance banning the feeding of waterfowl around the lakes.

Geese in particular make a mess of the grass in Lakeside Park. Their waste causes swimmers itch and encourages snails and chiggers.

Fishing Pier

Another project in the works is the construction of the Chad Judge Fishing Pier. \$30,000 has been raised so far to create a handicap-accessible fishing pier on Lake Mitchell.

Public Works Director Mike Goebel is working on a grant for this and is also taking donations.

The Big Lake Jaycees have raised \$5,000 towards the fishing pier so far through pancake breakfasts and spaghetti dinners. They have held three so far this year and more are planned for the fall.

City Support

"Thank you all for taking such good care of our lakes," said Mayor Lori Kampa, who was city council liaison to the association before she became mayor.

Kampa also thanked Goebel for getting the grant information together.

"The city council is committed to protecting the lakes," Kampa said. "The council has budgeted \$15,000 this year to help keep the lakes clean."

The council also contributed \$15,000 last year. Duane Langsdorf is the current city council liaison to the association.

Anna Ness of the Dept. of Natural Resources said that at this time of year, Eurasian milfoil is very fragile. It breaks apart and can float off to another part of the lake. In their own natural environment, invasive species have natural predators which keep them under control, Ness said.

"Without those predators, they outgrow native species and can take over a body of water, suffocating and killing native plants and animals," she said. "It's very prolific and alters a lake's natural ecosystem."

Eventually the dense mats of milfoil die back at the end of the season. Then they have a very strong, rotten stench.

Zebra Mussels

One invader which has recently become more of a threat is the zebra mussel, which, like most invasive species, has been spread by ballast water from ocean-going ships, sport fishing, stocking, bait harvesting or accidental release.

Native to European waterways, the mussels can grow up to two inches long. They are filter feeders with bissett threads which attach them like superglue to any surface, even crayfish or water beetles, suffocating them.

They filter the water of all the plankton, algae and other organisms baby fish feed on. Mature after one year, the female zebra mussel lays up to a

million eggs per year and has a life span in the U. S. of three to four years.

As filter feeders, the mussels also take in all the mercury and other toxins which might be in the water, so if a carp or a diving bird eats them, they may die from the build-up of toxins in the mussels.

Prevention

To prevent the spread of invasive species, don't take any water from one lake to another, Ness said. Drain live wells and transom wells. Dispose of live bait in the trash.

Power spray boats with hot water to remove any plant fragments or animal life. Let them dry thoroughly for 12 to 24 hours.

Inspect the boat carefully to make sure everything has been removed, including carpeting, ropes and jst skis. Report any new findings promptly, Ness said.

"Clean boats equal clean waters."