



Office of the Mayor

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April 2, 2009

Mathew J. Frank, Secretary
Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

RE: Review of Yahara Lake Levels

Dear Secretary Frank:

Thank you for your November 10, 2008 letter regarding the City of Madison's August 15, 2008 request that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources investigate, review and revise the authorized lake levels on Lakes Mendota and Monona to reduce the risk of future flooding. First of all, we have appreciated your willingness to work with the City and Dane County on short-term strategies that can be implemented yet this spring. We look forward to discussing that in great detail soon. As you know, the City believes that it is in the best interest of all stakeholders that the current lake levels and the impacts on the associated wetlands be reevaluated in light of the increasing flooding events and higher lake levels that have occurred in recent years.

It is my understanding from your letter that to begin the formal review process, you are asking that the City of Madison, as the petitioner for the change, must request a specific water level regime as a starting point. As you pointed out, proposing this water level regime will involve additional information gathering and intergovernmental consultation and consensus building. I can assure you that while the City will not proceed in this matter alone, the City is committed to helping the DNR gather information, build consensus and foster cooperation in pursuit of this important effort. Indeed, City staff have already been in contact with Sue Josheff, other DNR staff, and neighboring municipalities to begin working on the gathering of data and consensus building that will direct the ultimate proposal for a new water level regime.

The City's Engineering Division has recently completed a study of the water surface area of the Yahara River in the vicinity of Cherokee Lake to measure the wetland loss that has been occurring in that area. This study shows that from 1980 to 2007 there has been a significant loss of wetlands.

We are pleased that the Department recognizes that extreme storm events are becoming more frequent and we agree that shoreline damage and high groundwater levels are intertwined in the lake level issue. We are also in agreement that the Yahara lakes rise quickly during flooding events. However, the City believes that there exists a need to release water, or minimize the crest, in Lakes Mendota and Monona during times before the flood to protect the shorelands, wetlands, and recreational interests of all interested parties.

As you are likely aware, since our last communications the City has participated in a series of meetings with the DNR, Dane County and other local communities to develop short-term solutions to some of these problems. As the attached graph shows, over time the Yahara lakes have been operating at increasing levels. The City is working with these other interests to try and get the lake

Matthew Frank

Page 2

April 2, 2009

levels maintained below the maximum amounts this summer to minimize the adverse effects of the high waters. While the owners of recreational craft may prefer higher lake levels, we recognize that they, too, are impacted when lakes reach flooding levels. Indeed, as we move forward, perhaps the DNR, the City, and other stakeholders can work together to maintain a more navigable channel at the mouth of the Yahara River for boating while also protecting, enhancing and restoring wetlands.

In summary, this is important work, and the City recognizes the diverse interests at stake in adjusting the current water level regime. The City looks forward to working with the DNR and other stakeholders to build consensus and cooperation regarding a new lake level regime that will better reflect the increased frequency of large storm events, as well as take into consideration the other negative impacts the current water level regime has on property owners, municipalities, recreational interests, wetland preservation, and the flora and fauna that reside in the Yahara lake chain.

Sincerely,



David J. Cieslewicz
Mayor

DJC:pw

attach.

cc: City of Madison Common Council
Kathleen Falk, Dane County Executive
Mayor Kurt Sonnentag, City of Middleton
Patricia Amble, City of Middleton Clerk-Treasurer
Mayor Robb B. Kahl, City of Monona
Joan Andrusz, City of Monona Clerk
Mayor Jim Griffin, City of Stoughton
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Mike Harried, Village of McFarland President
Ed Minihan Town of Dunn Chairman
Richard Green, Town of Pleasant Springs Chairman
Kevin Connors, Director, Dane County Land and Water Conservation Department
Brett Hulse, Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission
Lloyd Eagan, WDNR South Central Regional Director
Larry D. Nelson, City of Madison City Engineer
Kevin Briski, City of Madison Parks Superintendent