



Lake Soundings

The Gilmore Lake Association Newsletter - Fall 2018



Narrows Trail during the great flood of 2016. Flooding last summer has raised questions about lake level fluctuations on Gilmore Lake.

The Rise and Fall of Gilmore Lake

Watershed Proximity Results in Frequent Water Level Fluctuations

Missing dock sections and the occasional wayward water craft marked another summer of significant water level fluctuation on Gilmore Lake. Over several days in June, the lake rose six feet over its baseline before returning to normal levels the following month.

The rising waters were the third flood of more than five feet in the past four years, prompting some residents to wonder if the water fluctuations are more frequent or dramatic than in past years. Although changing water levels are normal for Gilmore Lake, the magnitude of the changes may be higher than historic averages.

Over the years, Washburn County, the town of Minong, the Gilmore Lake Association, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and private engineering firms have studied the flooding issues affecting Gilmore Lake

...Continued on page 4

President's Message

Dear Lake Neighbors,
The sounds and smells of fall are upon us, and it's time to button things up for the winter. This is a bittersweet time for me, because I love spending time on the water, and I also love the quiet of winter-time on Gilmore Lake.

I'm pleased to report that we have 93 households that are members of the Association. Thank you so much for your ongoing support of the Association's efforts through your memberships and donations.

This past season, we have continued our lake water quality and level monitoring as well as treatment of EWM. These efforts help us to maintain the beauty of the lake. I want to thank all of the board and

...Continued on page 2

Zoning Board Approves New Property Development on Gilmore

Subdivision includes 10 lakeshore properties

The Washburn County Zoning Board has unanimously approved the subdivision of a 32-acre parcel of land at the south end of Gilmore Lake, near the boat landing. The proposed development, which includes a new road and 10 lakeshore properties, will undergo state review before submission to the county board for final approval.

The development called Gilmore Shores is the property of Secluded Land Company, based in De Soto, Wisconsin. According to its website, the company has developed and sold over 65,000 acres of wooded and waterfront properties throughout the United States and internationally.

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President's Message from page 1...

volunteers who have contributed to the work of the Association. All of us benefit from their efforts.

Have a great winter!

Fran McCloskey
President

State of the Lake

Water Quality Remains High; A New Chapter in 'Weed War'

Efforts to keep Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM) in check continue to be successful, but the nature of the battle has changed. Only about two of Gilmore Lake's 389 acres are affected by EWM. However, the invasive weed is less concentrated. The original EWM beds have been largely eradicated, but now there are more individual plants, particularly in Little Gilmore.

"I suspect the dispersed plants have something to do with the great flood," said John Ney, Ph.D., a Gilmore Lake Association Board member and a retired professor of fisheries ecology. John was referring to the 2016 flood whose 11-foot surge disrupted the ecosystem and may have scattered EWM to other parts of Gilmore Lake.

The lake association will continue to spot treat individual EWM plants with a granular aquatic herbicide called 2,4-D. The treatment binds specifically to EWM and does not disperse, John said. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 2,4-D has low toxicity for humans and can be safely used in lakes without harming other aquatic species.

EWM treatment efforts have been funded by approximately \$45,000 in DNR grants over the past five years that cover about two-thirds of the cost. The Gilmore Lake Association pays the other third using its membership fees, making resident participation essential for maintaining the high water quality of the lake. The association has applied for a DNR grant extension for 2019.

The lake association plans to continue training boat inspectors to identify EWM as well as zebra mussels, an invasive species with a striped, D-shaped shell and is typically .25 to 1.5 inches long. John cautions residents not to try removing EWM plants, which can grow several feet tall, from the lake. "The plants easily break and fragments can re-root in another location," said John. "Trying to pull them out probably will do more damage than good."

To report EWM, please send John an email at jney@vt.edu.

2019 Events

June 29: Annual Meeting & Picnic

- Meeting at 10:00 am, picnic to follow. Minong Town Hall.

July 4: Annual Boat Parade

- 1:00 pm. If inclement weather, it will be rescheduled based on the weather forecast at that time.

Proposed Subdivision continued from page 1...

While the proposed development complies with county subdivision laws, some Lake Gilmore residents are concerned about increased lake traffic, especially near the busy boat landing and Little Gilmore access point, as well as increased pollution from additional road run-off and septic systems.

"We have concerns from a safety perspective about putting in ten 100-foot lots in a part of the lake that's not wide and so close to the boat landing," said Jim Johnson, whose property is adjacent to the proposed development. "For this side of Gilmore, it will change the character of the lake dramatically in terms of traffic and aesthetics."

Al McCoy, general manager for Secluded Land Company, said that in response to residents' concerns, the access road for the subdivision will be located farther away from the lake so the water runoff will flow toward County Road I. In addition, each new property will be required to include a "rain garden" planted in a small depression that is designed to absorb rain water runoff from roofs, driveways or patios and keep it out of the lake.

"We have a significant investment in the lake, so we want to protect it," said McCoy. "We also do a lot of business in the county and want to approach every

project responsibly."

Johnson and several other lake residents spoke against the proposed subdivision at the recent zoning board committee meeting. One aspect of the plan that particularly rankled some residents is the proposed size of the 10 lakeshore lots. (Five back lots will not have deeded access to the lake.) A new state law requires 100 feet of lake shore per lot, compared with 150 feet under the old law.



In this aerial photo, red lot lines show the proposed 32-acre Gilmore Shores subdivision.

The plat map approved by the zoning board shows the lake front lots with 100 to 125 feet of shoreline. McCoy, however, does not think density will be an issue. "I'm sure one or two people will buy more than one lot. We see that all of the time."

Johnson is not so sure. "There could be 10 more docks if every lot is sold as a single unit." Secluded Land Company has begun clearing trees and installed a dock along an 80-foot-wide parcel that is adjacent to the Johnson property and runs from County Road I to the lake. Two future lots, which are not part of the current subdivision proposal, could have lake access via this strip, said McCoy.

If approved by the state and the Washburn County Board, construction of a new access road could begin this fall.



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Water Levels from page 1...

and nearby areas. A combination of three factors are primarily responsible for Gilmore Lake's rising and falling water levels: (1) A giant relatively flat watershed extends from Minong to Hayward, (2) near the confluence of a Gilmore Lake stream and Totogatic River is a narrow "pinch point," and (3) a wide flood plain lies between the Lake and the Totogatic.

Bill Huelsman, a retired civil engineer and member of the Gilmore Lake Association Board, recently explained how these geographic characteristics—along with large rainfalls—affect water levels. Bill and other members of the lake association have spent many hours studying the local topography, reviewing public and private engineering studies of Gilmore Lake, and considering various water management proposals.

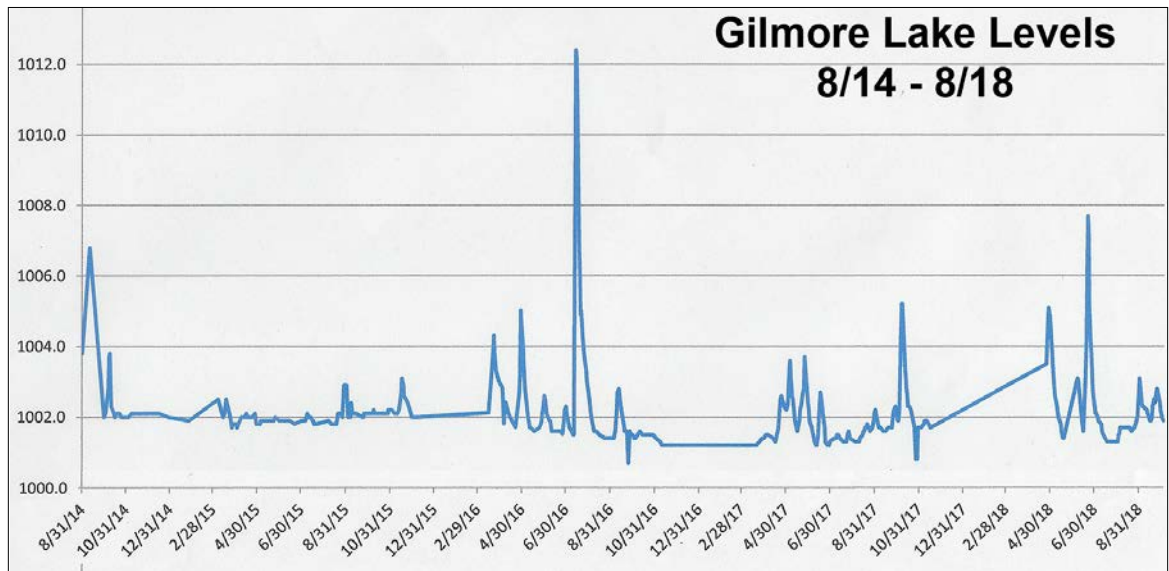
Why Gilmore Lake Water Levels Fluctuate

Gilmore Lake is connected by a meandering stream that flows into the Totogatic river, which begins in southwestern Bayfield county and flows westwardly before joining the Namekagon River in Burnett County, about 45 miles south of the city of Superior.

Upstream from Gilmore Lake, the

Totogatic's course runs through a 173-square-mile watershed that stretches roughly from Hayward and Cable in the east to the Minong flowage in the west. One inch of rain on one square mile is equal to about 17 million gallons, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. "There's only 200 feet of [elevation] fall for about 30 miles of watershed east of Gilmore, which is very flat and means all of that water needs to go somewhere," said Bill.

Much of the excess rainwater drains into the Totogatic river, which becomes narrow with high, steep banks just north of Gilmore Lake. A sharp curve in this quarter-mile stretch of river forms a "pinch point" that backs up following heavy rainfalls, pushing millions of gallons of water upstream into Gilmore Lake, which has an elevation only two feet higher than the Totogatic River. "Two days after a rain over the watershed and our water levels go up," said Bill. How much the water rises depends largely on the severity of the storm and how much of the rainfall is over the watershed. "A gentle rain of one



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to two inches over the entire watershed may cause Gilmore to rise more than a severe thunderstorm that only skirts the edge of the watershed,” Bill said. “Sometimes rapid snow melt contributes to flooding.”

The Gilmore Lake Association has been measuring rainfall and water levels for about four years. There is a definite correlation between rainfall and lake levels, said Bill. He estimates that one inch of rainfall may result in as much as a one-foot rise in lake levels, depending on the path of the rainstorm.

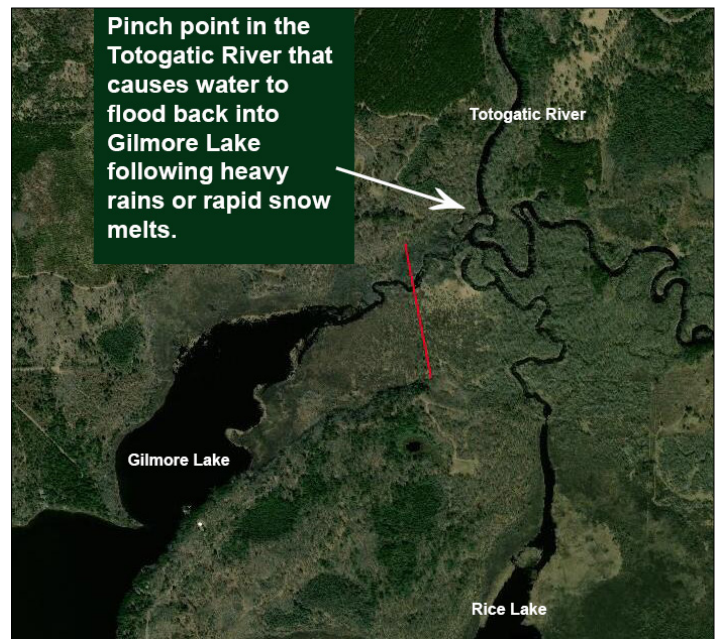
The Great Floods

Most residents recall the “great flood” of July 2016 when more than a foot of rain over the Totogatic watershed resulted in an 11-foot rise in Gilmore Lake water levels in just a few days. A big myth at the time was that the failure of the Colton dam 8.5 miles from Minong caused the flood. “It probably raised our lake levels about an inch,” said Bill. “The flooding almost entirely resulted from the tremendous rainfall across the watershed.”

Some people refer to the 2016 flood as a “100-year flood.” Actually, Gilmore Lake reached similar water levels in the great flood of 1946. More than nine inches of rain fell on northern Wisconsin over two days in late June that year, submerging highways and railroad grades, and sweeping away bridges. This event also washed out the Colton dam.

In response, the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, a forerunner of the DNR, began to regularly clear trees and debris from the quarter-mile stretch of the Totogatic River where its high banks and narrow channel create a bottleneck following heavy rains. The river-clearing efforts ceased about two decades ago. The DNR then designated the Totogatic a “wild river” to preserve the river’s natural beauty. “It may be a contributing factor to the frequency of our water fluctuations today,” said Bill.

In the 1980s, the Army Corp of Engineers initially recommended building a berm, an earthen barrier three feet high and 1,200 feet long, across the floodplain at the north end of the lake where the stream to the Totogatic begins—almost exactly the site of today’s beaver dam. “Those beavers know a thing



The red line marks the width of the floodplain at the north end of Gilmore Lake, where a stream flows into the Totogatic River.

or two about engineering,” quipped Bill. “Actually, the beaver dam helps stabilize lake levels by slowing the flow of water out of Gilmore.”

After further consideration, the berm project was rejected because its \$250,000 estimated cost was difficult to justify based on the value of affected lake properties in the 1980s. “Even if they had built the three-foot berm, it wouldn’t have done any good during last summer’s six-foot flood or the 11 feet we got in 2016,” said Bill.

More recently, the Gilmore Lake Association has consulted an engineering firm about other options. “There are still too many obstacles,” said Bill. The estimated cost for building a 1,200-foot dike would exceed \$1 million, the land needed is privately owned and the DNR is unlikely to approve construction of an access road into a wetland.

Lake residents have been adapting to Gilmore’s fluctuations. Landscaped berms now protect some flood-prone properties and some cabins have been relocated to higher ground. Floating docks have become more common and more residents are removing their boats from the water during extended periods away from the lake. “Unfortunately, there’s not much we can do about the changing lake levels, but over time, I think it may become less of an issue for property owners as we adapt,” said Bill.

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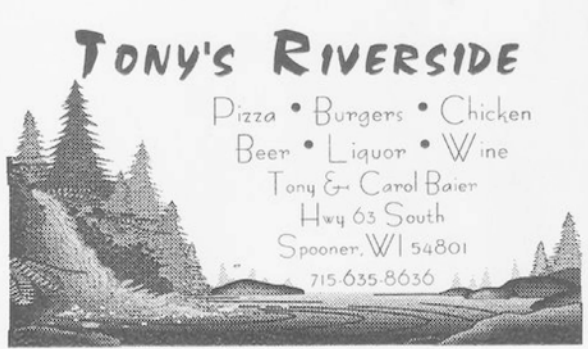
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