

ADOPTING A LAKE LEVEL MANAGEMENT GUIDE

The Dane County Lake Level Management Guide for the Yahara Chain of Lakes was prepared by the staff of the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department and approved by the Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission in October 2010. The guide provides an overview of the Yahara River chain of lakes (Mendota, Monona, Waubesa, and Kegonsa) and the strategies that are employed in an effort to manage lake levels within regulatory limits.

Dane County is responsible for developing and carrying out the operational strategies necessary to comply with the lake level orders set for Lake Mendota, Monona, Waubesa, and Kegonsa. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issued the most recent orders in 1979. The orders seek to balance many competing interests, including navigation, flood control, and fisheries and wildlife. The lake level orders do not specify how the control structures (dams) are to be operated. The orders only specify minimum and maximum water levels, minimum flows, and require that each lake be managed as part of the river system. Due to its comparatively large size, Lake Mendota acts as a buffer to provide storage for the lower lakes following large runoff events and, in combination with the Tenney Dam, provides the primary means of controlling lake levels throughout the system. Lake Mendota can be regulated to maximize in-lake storage capacity to protect downstream lakes from flooding due to its comparatively large size.

More intense rainfall events occurring in the last decade have added challenges to lake level management, and extreme rainfall events are predicted to increase in the future. According to the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts Stormwater Working Group, climate change in Wisconsin is likely to increase the severity and frequency of high river flows and water levels due to changes in rainfall. With the potential for more frequent and larger storm events to occur in the future, strategies for managing high flow situations become more critical.

The Yahara Lakes Advisory Group 2 (YLAG2) recently has completed a review of the lake level orders established by DNR in 1979. YLAG2 has just closed a comment period on 41 recommendations and the number one recommendation is to "Retain current water level orders until an observational network and modeling indicates a need for change in order to better balance public and private interests."

Since at least 2004, the Dane County Board has adopted the following flood mitigation objective "Maintain the levels of the Yahara lakes at the lower limit of the DNR's set operating range as part of a comprehensive strategy that addresses flood risk and the needs of fisheries, recreational interests, agricultural interests, and lakeshore property owners."

Additionally, the County Board has initiated a peer review of the Dane County Lake Level Management Guide for the Yahara Chain of Lakes, which will be complete by the end of June 2012. The review will address the management goals and operational strategies identified in the guide.

1           NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Dane County adopts the Dane County  
2 Lake Level Management Guide for the Yahara Chain of Lakes and directs that the guide be  
3 posted on the county website and used to manage, as a system, the levels of the Yahara Lakes.  
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5           Submitted by Supervisors Hendrick, Bayrd, Chenoweth, Veldran, Krause, Sargent and  
6 Wegleitner, June 21, 2012.  
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8 **Fiscal and Policy Notes not required.**  
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10           Referred to EXECUTIVE, ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES  
11 and LAKES & WATERSHED.  
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