

8/30/08

Juneau County Star Times Article Is this what going green really means?



AMANDA BECKER/STAR-TIMES

Wednesday afternoon at the Barnum Bay Marina on Petenwell Lake in Adams County, Virgil Miller scoops up some algae from the lake. Members of environmental groups and politicians gathered to look at the poor water conditions of the lake.

By Amanda Becker, Star-Times

Tom Koren, owner of the Lure Bar and Grill and Barnum Bay Marina on Petenwell Lake, said people call during the week to see how bad the algae is. "They don't ask if it's there, they know it is ... they want to know how bad it is," Koren said. "That's a sad story."

Koren said the algae problem has hurt his business. He said the toxins in the algae have caused dogs and children to become sick. He said there's even been green geese coming out of the water.

Wednesday afternoon, approximately 25 people passionate about Petenwell Lake gathered at the Lure Bar and Grill/Barnum Bay Marina to witness the algae conditions of the lake.

The purpose of the gathering was for environmental workers and politicians to come together and see the poor water conditions.

Rick Georgeson said he has sailed on Petenwell Lake since the mid 1970's. "I have a huge passion for this body of water," he said.

As a member of the Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards (PACRS), Georgeson said he shares his passion for Petenwell Lake with many others.

Barb Baker, with PACRS, said both Adams and Juneau counties are tourism areas. She said, economically, the areas are losing a lot of tourists. "There is an impact when it comes to tourism dollars," Baker said.

Virgil Miller agrees with Baker. Miller, with the PACRS, the Petenwell Castle Rock Property Owners' Association (PCPOA) and the Adams County Lakes Alliance, said all summer the

tourists have complained about the smell. "We don't want to lose tourists, but we need help," Miller said.

And with the cooler weather this past week, Miller said the algae conditions on the lake have gotten better. He said just last week, and throughout most of the summer, the algae was six inches deep and the odor was apparent for many miles.

What to do?

Wednesday afternoon Denny Caneff, Executive Director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin, said getting a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program would be an ideal, but expensive goal. He said the calculation program would cost more than a million dollars.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Web site, a TMDL is a calculation of the maximum amount of pollutants that a waterbody can receive and still meet water quality standards. A TMDL takes into consideration all contributing point and nonpoint-source pollution. Staff attorney for Midwest Environmental Advocates Betsy Lawton, said point-source pollution is "pretty much anything that comes out of a pipe." To clarify, she said point-source pollution originates from an identifiable source, for example, a discharge pipe from a factory or a paper processing facility.

Lawton said nonpoint-source pollution "doesn't come out of a pipe." She said nonpoint pollution comes from run-off from agricultural land and from storm water. Lawton said as water moves across land, it picks up pollutants that end up in large bodies of water. According to Lawton, nonpoint sources are not regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). And that is something Lawton is working to change.

Currently, Lawton is working on a petition to the USEPA to set standards that cause phosphorous and nitrogen pollution. She said the same pollutants that cause problems in Petenwell and Castle Rock Lakes end up down in the Gulf of Mexico.

Wisconsin has started a process of standards that reduce the phosphorous level, Lawton said. The process will create standards for point and nonpoint-source pollution.

With phosphorus being such a problem, Scott Watson with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), pointed out research from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

According to a study at UWSP, Watson said they should look at reducing the amount of phosphorus coming into the system by 50 percent. He said that is a difficult goal, but reasonable. If phosphorus levels would be reduced to half of what they are currently, Watson said there would be a noticeable reduction of algae on Petenwell and Castle Rock Lakes.

"Mother nature has some potential to clean itself if you limit the amount coming in," Watson said. "I mean, there's always going to be algae ... but it's pretty significant here."

Reaching out

Rep. Marlin Schneider (D-Wisconsin Rapids) attended the Wednesday gathering and said it is important to send letters to the governor and the DNR which give ideas and outline a plan. "That's the place to start," Schneider said. "But the process is going to be tough. The state budget is in deep trouble."

Also witnessing the water conditions was Sen. Julie Lassa (D-Stevens Point). She said it's imperative to get legislatures to network together, since other areas of the state are having

similar problems. "What's helpful now are these meetings," Lassa said. "Everyone here is looking at short and long-term solutions to help these bodies of water."