

Brainerd Dispatch Aug 12, 2010

LAKE IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT OK'D

Lake improvement district proposals have polarized the Crow Wing County Board in the past.

And while Tuesday's petition met with resistance, the board approved the residents' request to establish an LID on Upper South Long Lake in a split vote.

A view of Upper South Long Lake, southeast of Brainerd, was captured near the public access on a hot Wednesday with temperatures nearing 90 degrees. A request to establish a lake improvement district on the lake was approved at Tuesday's Crow Wing County Board meeting.



There are about 219 property owners on the lake. The county received 158 signatures, or 72 percent of the property owners, to establish the LID. The state statute requires 51 percent.

The LID calls for a \$75 fee to property owners, whether they have one or more parcels, for five years to address lake management, particularly curly-leaf pondweed. The LID is expected to raise \$16,300 per year. Residents said the annual fee amounted to \$6 per month.

Beyond work to control invasive species and monitor water quality, educational projects with the lake improvement districts include providing examples of proper shoreline management as a buffer zone and rain gardens as pollution prevention practice, as well as a wildlife inventory project.

By the numbers

Upper South Long Lake

- 802 acres with a maximum depth of 47 feet.
- 6.5 miles of shoreland.
- \$45,167,500 in estimated land value with a market value of \$62,632,900.

The DNR supported the LID but cautioned against taking on bigger issues of water quality improvement.

Mike O'Brien, president of the Lower South Long Lake Improvement Association and secretary/treasurer of the LID, said after four years of treatment there the water has improved dramatically. O'Brien said he hoped the board would give the Upper South Long Lake residents a chance to experience the same benefits.

"It's the wrong time to add taxes to anybody in these economic times," said Ron Warne, Paradise Shores Road.

Ron Trosvig, Upper South Long Lake Improvement Association president, applauded the county for coming up with a new policy and clear procedures.

Bruce Dybvig, vice president of the Upper South Long Lake association, said they tried to work solely with donations and volunteers but that wasn't enough. Dybvig said while the DNR cautioned against broader efforts on water quality, the partnership with the upper and lower lakes is at least a partial watershed. With education and monitoring as part of the effort, Dybvig said the group has a comprehensive plan.

Roger Kloster said he's been on the lake every summer since 1944 and remembers the weeds that were part of the lake even then. The only thing that has changed is the number of cabins on the lake, Kloster said.

Kloster said he just recently heard of the lake improvement district plan and he wondered how many people who signed the petition actually read the 19-page document. He pointed to the public access as an issue in regard to invasive species and said maybe consideration should be given to going back to a "private lake with no public access." Kloster suggested fundraisers be used and to put the idea of the LID on hold for a year.

William Kronsted, Maple Grove Township chairman and lake resident, said living on the lake full time for 32 years has meant watching the lake change perhaps more than seasonal residents may recognize. Kronsted said curly-leaf pondweed had choked out native plants. When he pays taxes, Kronsted said the money disappears into the state coffers but he didn't have any problem paying the \$75 that he knows is going back to the lake.

Ruth Naber, Graff Park Road seasonal resident, said water quality has to be the highest priority for a lake property owner. Naber said the fee amounted to \$1.44 a week, which can't buy a cup of coffee in many places.

Commissioner Doug Houge said he supports the lake associations and the work they do, but he could not support LIDs in general. Even a small amount is another tax, he said. ! Houge opposed the vote to approve the district, which passed 4-1.

Chairman Phil Trusty, who has voted both for and against LIDs in the past, said the county needed standards and now has them in place.

Commissioner Paul Thiede, who has opposed LIDs in the past saying the DNR wasn't doing as much as it could, noted 28 percent of residents didn't support the LID. People are being taxed off their lake homes, which is a sad commentary, Thiede said.

He said if the country was a democracy more than 50 percent in favor would be enough, but it was a republic with elected officials charged with making the decisions and until people start grasping that the nation is going to be going down the wrong road.

Thiede said he didn't have to justify his vote because the people will justify it or not by saying whether he is able to sit in the commissioner's chair. But since the LID was abiding by the requirements, Thiede said he would support it but will still be ready to challenge others coming forward.

Commissioners Rachel Reabe Nystrom and Rosemary Franzen exchanged looks after Thiede's comments.

Nystrom said Thiede never fails to shock her. Both Nystrom and Franzen have supported LIDs in the past. Nystrom said she stood with the 72 percent who felt the LID was a way to protect the lake.

Franzen said she didn't like to raise taxes but this was a tax people were calling for and the area can't wait for a lake to be 25 percent impaired before meeting state requirements for potential funding before the board let residents take care of their own property.

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