

Local lakes on impaired waters list

by Terrell Boettcher
News Editor

Several lakes in Sawyer County and surrounding counties are on an "impaired waters" list released last week by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for public comment as part of the state's two-year assessment of waters that do not meet federal water quality standards.

The local lakes continue to be listed because of concentrations of mercury in tested fish tissue.

Continuing to be on the impaired waters list, also called the 303D list, are:

- Black Lake (Birch Lake), in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National forest on the Sawyer-Ashland County border, fish tissue contaminated with mercury;

- Callahan/Mud Lakes, Town of Round Lake, fish tissue contaminated with mercury;

- Chippewa Flowage, fish tissue contaminated with mercury.

- Lake Loretta/Burnett Flowage, Town of Draper, fish tissue contaminated with mercury.

- Fishtrap Lake, Town of Winter, fish tissue contaminated with mercury.

- Ghost Lake, Town of Spider Lake, fish tissue contaminated with mercury; medium priority.

- Moose Lake, Town of Round Lake, fish tissue contaminated with mercury.

- Two Axe Lake, fish tissue contaminated with mercury.

- Winter Lake/Price Flowage, Town of Winter, fish tissue contaminated with mercury.

Another lake in this area that is on the impaired waters list is Deep Lake, a few miles southeast of Springbrook in Washburn County. It is proposed for the list due to total phosphorus and excess algae growth.

Harmon Lake southwest of Stone Lake in Washburn County is on the list due to fish tissue contaminated with mercury.

The Chippewa River in Sawyer and Rusk counties, which previously was on the impaired waters list due to polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in fish tissue, was taken off the list in 2008. Its water quality has improved and now meets federal standards.

Assessment process

The 1972 Clean Water Act requires states every two years to assess whether their waters meet the national goals of supporting healthy aquatic communities, habitat for wildlife and opportunities for fishing and swimming. States are to publish a statewide water quality report, develop an "Impaired Waters List" of lakes and rivers that do not meet state water quality standards, and submit plans for maintaining and improving water quality in a certain number of watersheds every cycle.

The impaired waters list is available for public comment through Feb. 20. It's one of three products Wisconsin is required to submit to the federal government assessing the condition of its lakes and rivers,

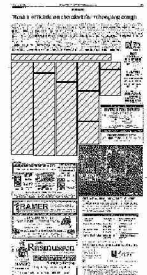
Tim Asplund, acting chief of DNR's water evaluation section, says the

new listings don't mean that water quality has suddenly decreased in these waters since the 2010 impaired waters list was submitted, but likely reflect a combination of factors: new data submitted for consideration, new phosphorus standards that for the first time set numeric criteria for how much of this nutrient can be in lakes and rivers, and new methodologies for weighing whether to add or remove a water from the list, he says.

"The process of listing waters as impaired is a constantly evolving, changing process because the science and assessment methods are constantly evolving," Asplund says. "Some of these waters may have been impaired for a long time but we now have more clear parameters to make listing decisions, and in many cases, more information."

For the 2012 process, data was evaluated from monitoring conducted by DNR, the U.S. Geological Survey and county health departments, as well as from groups that submitted data including the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, the Alliance for the Great Lakes, Centerville Cares, the Silver Lake Management District and the Wisconsin Resources Protection Council.

For water bodies identified as impaired, DNR develops analytical models called Total Maximum Daily Loads, or TMDLs, that set pollution reduction goals, identify sources of pollutants, and recommend best management practices. When monitor-



ing shows that the water-body is again meeting water quality standards, the water body is removed from the Impaired Waters List, Asplund says.

DNR has also compiled and put online a wide array of information about thousands of other waters. People can use DNR's new Search your Water! tool, which provides easy online access to available monitoring data and descriptions of projects that have occurred on or near the

water.

The products — Wisconsin's proposed list of waters that do not meet water quality standards and a group of plans for maintaining or improving water quality in 24 of 330 watersheds across the state — also are the subject of a Jan. 5 webcast set to begin at 1:30 p.m. People will need to register online.

Comments on the Clean Water Act Condition Summary and Watershed Plan Updates may be sub-

mitted via e-mail to lisa.helmuth@wisconsin.gov or to Wisconsin DNR, Watershed Planning/Helmuth (WT/3), P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921.

Comments on the proposed Impaired Waters List may be submitted via e-mail through to DNRImpairedWaters@wisconsin.gov or to Wisconsin DNR, Water Evaluation Section.