

Grindstone River Dam Public Informational Meeting – questions raised and DNR responses

[Questions raised by attendees are grouped by subject matter, neither importance nor order asked. ‘DNR staff response’ summarizes response provided during meeting and is not intended to be verbatim. Questions raised during the small group discussions are noted as such and were *not* addressed in front of the large group.]

- **Downstream Woody Debris**

- What can local citizens do about the woody debris in the downstream section of the river?
 - *DNR staff response:* A DNR Public Water Work permit is not required to remove debris below the ordinary high water level as long as there is no excavation and the streambed is not changed. The ordinary high water level on a stream or river is the top of the banks. Debris includes trees, logs, stumps and trash. The removed debris must be placed outside of public waters and public waters wetlands.
- Small group discussion - What are some other resources available with regards to woody debris removal?
 - *DNR staff response:* <http://www.conservationcorps.org/adoptariver/>
 - Marty Torgerson, Area Parks and Trails Supervisor - martin.c.torgerson@state.mn.us; 218-460-7024
 - Erik Pelto, State Water Trail Program - eric.pelto@state.mn.us; 651-259-5577

- **Sediment**

- If the dam is removed, will there be sand/mud flats everywhere?
 - *DNR staff response:* The reservoir sediment will be visible for a short amount of time. Vegetation will begin to sprout up within the first growing season. In similar projects in the past we have planted native plants in the remaining sediments which become the new floodplain of the river. We intend to include a seeding aspect to the project, provided the funding allows for it.
- Why is there a large delta in the upstream reaches of the reservoir?
 - *DNR staff response:* This is seen in many reservoirs. As the swifter flowing river water encounters the slower, flat waters of the reservoir the slope decreases and the water slows. In this transition area the water is no longer able to transport the sediment load being moved by the river channel thus the sediments drop out forming a delta where the river meets the reservoir. Dam removal would result in a defined channel flowing through the remaining sediments that can transport the river’s sediment load. The delta will not be addressed if a reservoir is retained.

- **Road (Dunn Ave.)**

- Small group discussion - Will the road lead to any water?
 - *DNR staff response:* Yes, in the case of the rock arch rapids option, the current reservoir would remain the same. If the dam were to be removed, the river would flow near the parking lot where the dam currently stands.
- Will the road lead to an area of recreation?
 - *DNR staff response:* Yes, although the type of recreation may not be exactly as it is now. Two of the options [rock arch rapids or structure removal] will improve fish passage thus the abundance of many fish species will increase. In any case, the Hinckley Aquatic Management Area (AMA) will exist for public use into the future, with either a reservoir retained or a free-flowing river.

- The road was recently improved (paved). It should be clarified to the public as to how that was funded (City vs. state funds), there seems to be local confusion about this.
 - *DNR staff response:* Agreed. Much of that project was funded by a grant that the City received from the DNR and MNDOT. This grant was funded by the State Park Road Account which helps local governments improve local roads that lead to state public recreation facilities – in this particular case, the Hinckley AMA / Grindstone River.
- **Water Levels and Flooding**
 - Do downstream landowners need to be concerned with increased flood risk?
 - *DNR staff response:* Flows will be modeled as part of the permitting process. To meet the FEMA “No rise” certification, the project will be designed to assure no changes in downstream flood risk.
 - Will water be deep enough for Lake Sturgeon to swim in?
 - *DNR staff response:* Yes, dependent on water levels that naturally fluctuate.
 - Small group discussion - How deep will the pools be downstream of the riffles?
 - *DNR staff response:* Similarly constructed riffles on other rivers have resulted in pools 5 to 15 feet deep depending on river size and substrates.
 - Small group discussion - What will the site look like under low-flow conditions?
 - *DNR staff response:* Similar to the upstream North and South Branches but larger since it will carry the combined flow.
 - Will water levels remain the same upstream and downstream?
 - *DNR staff response:* Water levels upstream of the reservoir will depend on what option is chosen. Downstream water levels will be the same no matter which option is chosen.
- **History and Preservation**
 - Why was the dam installed in the first place?
 - *DNR staff response:* The dam currently in place was constructed to provide a water source for fish rearing ponds.
 - Will the project be subject to historical review? Who conducts the historic review?
 - *DNR staff response:* Yes, the State Historic Preservation Office will be involved if the project moves forward.
 - What attempts will be made to preserve the history of the site if the dam is removed or modified?
 - *DNR staff response:* One of the goals of the public meeting was to foster comments that could help us identify ways that the history can be acknowledged and/or captured should the dam be removed.
- **Habitat**
 - Will the fish be able to make it into Grindstone Lake?
 - *DNR staff response:* There is still a carp barrier-style structure that exists between Hinckley and Grindstone Lake.
 - Will the carp barrier upstream need to come out too?
 - *DNR staff response:* There may be opportunity to remove that structure sometime in the future.
 - Small group discussion - What will the impact be to the local wildlife (otter, minks, waterfowl, etc.)?
 - *DNR staff response:* The project will benefit local wildlife that depend on river migrations; river otter and mink can use both lake and river habitats. Anecdotal evidence suggests that river otters use the areas surrounding dam modification or removal sites. While waterfowl habitat will change if the dam is removed, rivers are heavily used by waterfowl and shorebirds. Ducks and geese often nest along rivers and take advantage of the

increased shoreline length. Shorebirds benefit from the high invertebrate production in river channels.

- How will rock arch rapids and rock riffles impact the dynamics of the stream?
 - *DNR staff response:* A rock arch rapids at the dam site that is designed to retain the current reservoir water level will a) allow fish and aquatic organism passage upstream, b) eliminate the dangerous hydraulics created by dams and c) provide riverine habitat. If the dam were removed rock riffles would be constructed within the river channel. The riffles provide grade control that prevents the new channel from eroding down into the reservoir sediments. The riffles would also provide ideal riverine habitat including steeper rocky areas and deep pools just below.
- Will removing the dam allow unwanted species to move upstream?
 - *DNR staff response:* It would allow fish passage of all species. Currently there are records of Common Carp in the watershed. On a broader scale, the falls at Taylors Falls/St. Croix Falls are considered a complete barrier to swimming fish.
- Where is the nearest sturgeon spawning habitat?
 - *DNR staff response:* The Hinckley Fisheries office cannot, with confidence, state that Lake Sturgeon are successfully spawning at *specific* locations X and Y. Likely spawning habitat (riffles) exists at the site of the [removed] Sandstone dam. Spawning activity has been reported in the Moosehorn River near the City of Moose Lake, which is in the upper part of the Kettle River watershed.

- **Site Appearance**

- What will the site look like if the dam is removed? (Don't want willows to take over)
 - *DNR staff response:* Exposed sediment would be covered by vegetation relatively quickly. Over time the area would transition to a floodplain forest.
- Small group discussion - How long will it take for the site to be aesthetically pleasing?
 - *DNR staff response:* If the dam were removed, vegetation would begin to sprout up during the first growing season. Floodplain forest development would take longer and depend on the size and success of the trees planted.
- What happens to the exposed sediments?
 - *DNR staff response:* Sediments exposed by the dam's removal or modification would quickly revegetate. With similar projects, seeding and staking has been used to speed up the greening process, even cover crops have been used to temporarily stabilize the exposed sediment to prevent it from being eroded into the stream.
- Will the old saw mill pier be exposed?
 - *DNR staff response:* Possibly, but unknown at this time.
- If the dam is removed, will all the cement, rebar and debris be removed as well?
 - *DNR staff response:* Most likely, unless some remains as part of a cost-savings measure. It will be of utmost importance to leave the site as natural and safe as possible.

- **Recreation**

- Is it possible to build a trail system that would connect the AMA to the Munger State Trail?
 - *DNR staff response:* AMA rules will dictate and may restrict what the Department can and cannot entertain within its boundaries.
- What types of recreation will be available at the site?
 - *DNR staff response:* Although the types of recreation available will change if the dam is removed, the public will still be able to use the area to access the river for fishing or canoeing/kayaking, in addition to other allowable activities on 'general use' AMAs.

- **Fisheries Ponds**

- How will water be supplied to the rearing ponds?
 - *DNR staff response:* Fisheries is currently working with Engineering staff to explore other options for filling the ponds. Water may be pumped directly from the river.
- **Funding**
 - Are funds already allocated for this project?
 - *DNR staff response:* Yes, just this past year the Dam Safety Program was awarded a lump sum for various dam work across the state. At this time, \$500,000 has been allocated toward the Grindstone Dam. Additionally, \$100,000 has been secured from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Funds. These funds are specifically for projects that "...restore, protect, and enhance Minnesota's wetlands, prairies, forests and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife..."
- **Public Information**
 - Will there be another meeting once a decision has been made?
 - *DNR staff response:* Updates regarding the project will be located on the Hinckley Area Fisheries website. We will consider another public meeting in the future.
 - Small group discussion - Will the City of Hinckley be involved to increase recreation as the project moves forward?
 - *DNR staff response:* AMA rules will impact what options we will have within its boundaries but we are fully willing to consider ideas generated by the local community and City staff.
 - What is the current timeline of the project?
 - *DNR staff response:* Internal discussions will take place to review the information gathered at the public meeting. A number of important details will need to be determined before the larger decision can be made. We will continue to move forward with the intent to have a decision made sometime this winter as to the fate of the dam. Funding for the project expires in 2020.
 - Will each landowner receive a letter with updates in the future?
 - *DNR staff response:* Our current plan is to provide updates via the Hinckley Area Fisheries website (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/hinckley/index.html>). The local paper will also be utilized when possible. We will consider using a direct mailing to river landowners to provide updates in the future and welcome additional ideas for keeping the community informed.