

## Heron Lake Management Plan – Public and Stakeholder Comments Summary

Comment	Response
Consider adding a partial drawdown schedule.	Realistically, we will only be able to achieve a partial drawdown during most years. This is a good suggestion and we addressed it in the management plan.
Consider conducting longer drawdowns to make more of an impact.	Minnesota Statutes limit water level drawdowns to a maximum of two consecutive years. We cannot conduct a drawdown that would last longer than two years.
Change the plan from may drawdown to will drawdown when parameters are met.	We will consider many factors, including local land conditions, when deciding if we will conduct a drawdown on Heron Lake. We cannot guarantee that we will implement a drawdown every time conditions allow, so we will keep the current wording.
Concern that drawdowns might negatively impact muskrat populations on Heron Lake.	We collected additional data in February 2021 to assess how drawdowns might affect muskrat populations and water levels in Heron Lake, especially the North Marsh area, to address this concern. We found that even at full pool conditions, North Marsh and North Heron would freeze nearly to the bottom during the winter months. We addressed this issue in the management plan.
Concern with drawing down the lake too frequently.	We did not intend to imply that we would be drawing down the lake every year. We clarified our drawdown plans in the management plan.
Approve of implementing drawdowns on Heron Lake.	Drawdowns will remain a tool in the management plan.
Remove the State Dam.	The State Dam will remain and be used to implement drawdowns.
Expand the State Dam to increase its capacity to outlet water.	The outflow from Heron Lake is ultimately controlled by the channel capacity downstream so increasing the weir width would do little to increase flows from the lake during high water events. Minnesota State Rules also prevent changes that would result in increased flooding downstream of the dam.

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Approve of repairing the State Dam.	We are actively working to find a reasonable solution and make the needed repairs at the State Dam.
Approve of the State Dam being open in the winter/spring to create more storage.	We removed this from the management plan because the primary objective of managing Heron Lake is to improve wildlife habitat, not create water storage. Flooding has not been an issue the last several years despite the above average precipitation we have received and the hydraulic gate on the State Dam being inoperable since 2017.
Consider opening the hydraulic gate in high precipitation events to facilitate water movement and reduce sediment deposition.	The outflow from Heron Lake is ultimately controlled by the channel capacity downstream.
Approve of fish stocking.	Walleye and northern pike are known to help control rough fish populations, such as black bullheads and fathead minnows, so predator fish stocking will remain in the plan. However, wildlife habitat improvement will remain the primary management goal.
Do not support stocking predator fish.	Stocking predator fish is one of the few tools available for management of rough fish in Heron Lake. We do not want to eliminate this management strategy because other management options are limited.
Do not support promoting a recreational walleye fishery.	We realize that by stocking walleye, we may provide recreational fishing opportunities. However, sustaining a recreational fishery is not a goal of this management strategy. We clarified this in the management plan.
Focus on stocking more northern pike rather than walleye.	We will stock both walleye and northern pike following any substantial mortality event or when surplus fry are available. Walleye fry are more available than northern pike fry in Minnesota. Stocking of both walleye and northern pike is contingent upon availability.
Consider monitoring how stocking predator fish affects aquatic macroinvertebrate communities.	We do not currently have the funding or resources to monitor invertebrates in Heron Lake. Instead, we are relying upon presence of aquatic vegetation as a measurement for our management actions. Aquatic vegetation provides critical habitat for aquatic invertebrates, so by increasing the amount of aquatic vegetation in Heron Lake, we also should be increasing the aquatic invertebrate populations.

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Use commercial fishing to help reduce rough fish populations.	All fish management options will be considered to enhance Heron Lake (except aeration systems), including the use of commercial fishing operations.
Include a goal to maintain and monitor aquatic invertebrates.	We do not currently have the funding or resources to monitor aquatic invertebrates in Heron Lake.
All management actions should support improvement for waterfowl and other wildlife.	They all are supportive of habitat improvement for waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife.
Need to study waterfowl production on Heron Lake to understand what factors are helping/hurting this production.	There is abundant evidence in scientific literature supporting the concept of providing quality waterfowl habitat by promoting aquatic vegetation growth.
Need more data to determine how drawdowns impact wildlife and the Heron Lake system.	We collected additional bathymetry data on each of the sub-basins in Heron Lake during February 2021. We used this information to modify the drawdown section of the management plan.
Need to better manage the water coming into Heron Lake.	We hope to accomplish this by working with our partners to promote Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the watershed.
Do not manage water levels for favorable duck hunting access.	We will consider implementing a managed drawdown when conditions allow. A managed drawdown may make duck hunting access difficult, but managed drawdowns will probably only occur once every 8-10 years. In periods outside of managed drawdowns, we will try to manage water levels as close to the normal operating elevation as possible.
Water levels should be held at a higher level.	The water levels will be managed as close to the normal operating elevation as possible, outside of managed drawdown periods. We cannot and would not hold water levels high because high water levels could cause downstream flooding and damage private property or roads.
Dredge the lake for deeper fishing holes and connectivity between sub-basins.	Heron Lake is a designated wildlife lake, so we would not dredge it to create deeper water for fish. If there is excessive siltation in the channels connecting the different sub-basins, a channel excavation project may be considered at some point in the future.

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Add a dam in Division Creek to help control water levels in South Heron.	This is something the DNR is not interested in pursuing. We are interested in managing the Heron Lake system as a whole and do not want to manage the different sub-basins separately.
Promote BMPs in the watershed as much as possible.	This is already one of the main objectives in the management plan; we did not remove it from the plan.
Focus on improving water clarity.	By promoting the growth of submersed and emergent aquatic vegetation, we also are promoting improved water clarity. Aquatic vegetation helps lower levels of suspended sediments, total phosphorus, and chlorophyll-a, which should lead to improved water quality and clarity.
Further clarify the Heron Lake Waterfowl Working Group's goals.	We have already given a brief overview of the HLWWG in the management plan. There are many different organizations helping with habitat improvement projects within Heron Lake and its watershed. We appreciate the efforts of all these organizations, but the management plan is not the appropriate place to define goals for specific local groups. The management plan can be used as a guide for these groups on which to base their work.
Clarify the management objectives to include wildlife-focused and habitat condition outcomes.	All our management objectives and actions are wildlife and habitat focused already. We also include management triggers within the plan that list the wildlife and habitat outcomes we hope to achieve by implementing our management actions.
Specify what emergent vegetation we are encouraging.	We are trying to promote any species of emergent vegetation native to Minnesota. We clarified that we are not trying to encourage the growth of hybrid cattails. Based on the comments we received, hybrid cattails seem to be the primary emergent vegetation species of concern due to its invasive tendencies.
Manage South Heron for fish and North Heron for waterfowl/wildlife.	Both North and South Heron are included in the M.S. 97A.101 status and the management will continue to emphasize wildlife habitat. Additionally, separating the management of the sub-basins would require additional infrastructure that would be very costly.

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Concern about hybrid cattails taking over if the lake is drawn down, especially in North Marsh.	This is a legitimate concern and we addressed this in the management plan.
Work with the Jackson County Conservation League.	There are many different organizations helping with habitat improvement projects within Heron Lake and its watershed. We appreciate the efforts of all these organizations. The DNR will continue to work with any interested local partners/organizations that are interested in targeting conservation programs, land stewardship improvements, and habitat enhancement projects with Heron Lake and its watershed.
Make all of Heron Lake a State Wildlife Refuge area.	This is not something the DNR is interested in pursuing due to the diverse resource user groups that currently utilize Heron Lake. We should be able to accomplish our management objectives and actions under the current wildlife lake designation (M.S. 97A.101).
Improve the boat accesses on Heron Lake.	The DNR only maintains one boat access on the west side of South Heron. The other two boat accesses (i.e., community point park and sandy point park) are owned and maintained by Jackson County.
Improve Lake Flahtery at the same time as Heron Lake.	Lake Flahtery is a completely different basin; therefore, it should not be included in the Heron Lake management plan. Currently, the DNR does not have authority to do any water level management on Lake Flahtery and the lake does not have a public access. If the DNR secures the legal management authority to manage Lake Flahtery in the future, a specific management plan will be written for that lake.
Focus on improving Duck Lake instead.	We do not have the legal authority to manage Duck Lake because it was not included in the original wildlife lake designation for Heron Lake. Therefore, we did not include it in the management plan.
Stop the tiling into Heron Lake.	The DNR is not the regulatory authority that controls most tiling on agricultural lands so we cannot stop it. The DNR is focusing on working with local partners to promote BMPs in the watershed and improve the quality of water flowing into Heron Lake.

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Response</b>
Add an executive summary to the beginning of the plan.	We have already provided this summary in a separate document. Copies of this summary will be provided when requested.
Move the management goals and objectives section to the beginning part of the plan and reorganize it to improve the flow.	The management plan currently follows the standard DNR format for shallow lake management plans.