

Protective Elevation for White Bear Lake

What is the protective elevation for White Bear Lake?

- The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has established 922.0 feet above mean sea level as the protective elevation for White Bear Lake in Ramsey and Washington counties.
- The current level of White Bear Lake can be reviewed from the DNR lake gaging website.

Why did the DNR establish a protective elevation for White Bear Lake?

- The protective elevation is intended to protect and maintain fish and wildlife habitat and support recreational uses of the lake.
- A protective elevation is a regulatory measure used to trigger changes in water appropriations to prevent undue harm to a lake.
- Historically, they have been used as a part of surface water appropriation permits.
- This is the first protective elevation established by the DNR to manage groundwater use rather than direct surface water appropriations.

How did the DNR identify the protective elevation?

- The DNR considered multiple factors, including:
 - The historic record of lake water levels.
 - Aquatic vegetation important for fish and wildlife habitat
 - Water quality and clarity
 - Recreational uses, including boat access, navigation, and swimming beaches
 - Area and slope of the lakebed

How will the protective elevation affect lake levels?

- Lake levels in White Bear Lake are driven by several factors and will continue to fluctuate and move above or below the protective elevation in any given year.
- The protective elevation is not a lake level that will be maintained or guaranteed.

How do lake levels impact White Bear Lake?

- Low lake levels can impact recreational uses of the lake, such as private docks and swimming beaches.
- Periodic low lake levels do not harm the lake's biology or ecology. In fact, the DNR found that periodic low water levels renew aquatic vegetation, providing important habitat for fish and wildlife. Robust native aquatic vegetation also protects shorelines from erosion due to waves and ice-heaving.

How will the DNR use the protective elevation in permit decisions?

- Establishing the protective elevation is the first step in a multi-part process. The DNR will consider how to apply the protective elevation to existing and new groundwater appropriation permits in the area.
- The first step in this phase is evaluating the impact of groundwater use on White Bear Lake water levels. For those appropriations demonstrated to have a material effect on lake levels, the DNR will then modify the permits to incorporate the protective elevation.
- Permit modifications might include implementing use restrictions to help support the protective elevation. Such use restrictions would focus reduction on nonessential use such as lawn watering. Essential residential water use, such as drinking, cooking, and cleaning would not be restricted.
- The forthcoming USGS regional groundwater model is one source of information the DNR will use in evaluating groundwater use impacts and determining permit modifications.

How does the lawsuit relate to the protective elevation?

- The DNR is setting the protective elevation in connection with the 2014 settlement agreement among parties to litigation concerning water levels on White Bear Lake. The plaintiffs claim permitted groundwater withdrawals are damaging White Bear Lake. The DNR appealed the Ramsey County District Court order and the Minnesota State Court of Appeals is expected to make a decision in 2019. The DNR appealed the Ramsey County District Court order and the Minnesota State Court of Appeals, in April 2019, reversed a prior District Court decision in the case and remanded the matter back for further administrative proceedings. More information is on the DNR website.

What is the difference between protective elevation and ordinary high water level?

- The protective elevation is not the same as the ordinary high water level (OHW). The OHW is a regulatory term and is defined as the elevation where vegetation transitions from primarily aquatic to primarily upland.
- The OHW is not an average water level, and it is not a goal for water levels.
- Water levels may occasionally rise above the OHW for relatively brief periods of time, but are below the OHW the large majority of the time.
- The OHW for White Bear Lake is 924.9 feet above mean sea level.

What is the elevation of White Bear Lake outlet?

- The elevation at the lake outlet is 924.3 feet above mean sea level.