

Council, agencies hash out lake's restoration details

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 02 August 2012 13:47 -

Everything from figuring out a sure-fire way to eliminate geese to reviewing other details about the rehabilitation of Lake Helen were discussed during a special meeting July 24.

Gothenburg City Council members met with representatives from LakeTech, Inc., Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, JEO Consulting and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality.

The NGPC and DEQ have already committed funding and resources to the project with several other agencies expected to do the same.

Public hearing set Aug. 7

At the end of the hour-long meeting, the council decided to have a public hearing about the plan on Tuesday, Aug. 6, at 7 p.m.

City engineer Travis Mason of Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers of Kearney shared a master plan in which a shallow north lobe of the lake will be eliminated to get rid of a severe phosphorous problem and help maintain a healthier lake.

High nutrients, especially phosphorous, produce toxic algae blooms that kill fish, can be deadly to dogs and other animals that drink out of the lake and can cause human skin rashes, according to Paul Brakhage, a LakeTech, Inc. consultant hired by the council.

Filling in the smaller, shallower part of the lake will require less well and canal water to keep it full, officials said.

The larger lake will be drained, Mason said, and the bottom dredged 10 to 15 feet. Sediment will be removed and the surface sealed.

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More water in deeper lake

Brakhage noted that the removal of the small lake will mean fewer surface acres but more water because the area will be deeper.

By filling in the north lobe, officials say Lake Helen will shrink from about 27 to 20.7 acres.

Mason shared several other aspects of the master plan that included such things as jetties, new rip rapping and tall grass to buffer against geese near the walking trail surrounding the lake, a fishing pier, dock and spawning area.

Brakhage emphasized the importance of getting rid of large flocks of migratory and domestic geese.

"They are seriously degrading the lake," Brakhage said, noting that research shows the geese producing 6,000 pounds of phosphorous yearly through feces. "A lake should have 40 pounds or less."

Geese removal ideas

Besides cables strung across the lake to keep geese from landing during migratory periods, other suggestions included getting a resident dog to chase or owls to prey on geese and painting eggs.

If geese return after the lake is rehabilitated, even for a year, Brakhage said years would pass before pristine conditions could be restored.

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To eliminate undesirable fish from the lake, a special screen will be installed to filtrate eggs from the Nebraska Public Power District canal.

Adding bass to prey on unwanted fish would be helpful, said DEQ fish tissue program coordinator Greg Michl.

Well water plans

The canal provides some water for the lake in May and June although most is pumped through a well.

Well water will be delivered to two different parts of the newly configured lake to help keep temperatures low (to thwart the growth of blue-green algae) and keep water circulating.

Brakhage said watershed treatment will keep storm water runoff from Lake Avenue from draining into the lake. The runoff contains high nutrient levels and gravel and dirt.

Unfilled lake time line

How long the lake will stay drained is questionable, Brakhage said, noting that it could range from a year to two years.

Funding priorities from different agencies will be known in February, he said, which means that the lake could be drained before next year's spring migration.

However Brakhage said city officials won't have grant money until later.

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“But I’d feel comfortable starting if you are high on the list of funding,” he said.

In unrelated action, the council approved a designated license for Gothenburg Tire to serve alcohol at an Aug. 10 event and All Points Cooperative and Skyview Farms to do the same on Aug. 17.