

Sen. Cowles: Shawano Community concerned about federal government

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SHAWANO- Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement over the frustration faced by residents around Shawano Lake and visitors to this major recreation hub who are eagerly waiting on a decision from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to raise Shawano Lake water levels:

“The sad reality that residents and visitors realize is that the decision to increase water levels by a few inches on Shawano Lake does not rest in the hands of local leaders, state agencies, or other local experts in lake management. Instead, keeping water levels at historic norms requires the federal government’s stamp of approval. The comment period for the docket that would raise water levels on Shawano Lake closed ten days ago, but boaters and area businesses supported by the recreational economy find themselves wondering when FERC will make a decision in keeping with historic water levels.”

A temporary order would raise Shawano Lake back to the historic 30-year lake level starting immediately and running for the duration of this summer. The break from historical water levels started in early 2018 when FERC ordered Shawano Lake levels to be drawn down by approximately five inches, resulting in concerns from lake-goers for their safety and ability to recreate as even lower lake levels on the already shallow Shawano Lake exposed more structure on the lake bottom resulting in potential hazards that could lead to injury or property damage. Lower water levels also limited access to the lake at public boat launches and on the shorelines and docks for waterfront property owners. The 2018 issue was resolved by the 4th

of July weekend after Senator Cowles and Representative Gary Tauchen (R-Bonduel) learned about the issue from Shawano Area Waterways Management in early June and helped to expedite the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and FERC processes to raise water levels. This included submitting comments in-favor of the request.

The reversal was only a temporary reprieve for the summer of 2018, and more action was required for lake levels this year and beyond. The public comment period for this summer's temporary docket, which against Senator Cowles' urging was delayed for submission this year, closed on June 14th and yet no decision has been rendered. The temporary order to raise the Shawano Lake levels is necessary to let lake-goers enjoy recreating in the water this summer while a permanent order is working its way through a more tedious FERC process. This decision is commonly seen as vitally important for the local economy.

"Perhaps FERC fails to realize the implications of this delayed decision. Any further delay not only impedes recreation heading into a busy Fourth of July week, but seriously risks safety and property damage for those who don't realize what's just below the surface because it hasn't been exposed most of the past thirty years. I trust FERC will make the right call and issue this temporary order to raise water levels back to historic norms, and I hope it will be sooner rather than later."