

Robinson Lake Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project
Feasibility Study Public Meeting
Summary of Comments & Questions
17 May 2023

General comments:

- Consider human habitat – recreation and human use of Robinson Lake.
- Consider economic benefits from recreation.
- Landowners noticed a lot of sedimentation, shallow depths in Lake Robinson, changes over the years in areas that were deeper and had good fishing.
- The project near Brownsville, MN (Lower Pool 8 Islands Project) has been beneficial.
- Vegetation and sedimentation seem to get worse each year and weeds are everywhere.
- Some areas along the shoreline are too shallow to even canoe through.
- Some areas are very thick with wild rice or lily pads.
- There used to be eight feet of depth in front of my dock but now it's two or three feet deep.
- Robinson Lake is beautiful and a great area for wildlife – it's a national treasure.
- Consider a win/win scenario with improving for citizens (e.g., dredging) while creating island with that material without additional costs.
- Consider flow and sediment impacts from the Indian Slough project in the 1990s – closing rock structures in Robinson Lake were constructed around that time as well

Does the project area include Wilcox Landing? The area has filled in/reduced depth over the years (*Wilcox landing boat ramp in state land or area near Teepeota point?)

- The Wilcox Boat Ramp in the Lower Pool 4 (LP4) Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (MN DNR) is not included in the project study area, but the channel would be. The area in Robinson Lake near Teepeota Point and Wilcox Lane is included in the study area.

Is wild rice considered a noxious weed? It has been spreading a lot in the lake.

- No, wild rice is an important source of food for ducks. It is an annual plant so the extent of wild rice in an area may vary from year to year, depending on water levels and other conditions.

Have you considered reconnecting historic Zumbro River channel into Robinson Lake?

- The historic Zumbro River channel was discussed by the team, however, it is outside of the study area/authority for the Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) program.

Has the Corps done velocity measurements?

- The Corps completed discharge and velocity data collection in May and June. The data will be used for hydraulic modeling and design.

Where does the sediment come from?

- Sediment is an issue throughout the Upper Mississippi River. For Lower Pool 4, the Minnesota River and the Chippewa River are major sources of sediment. Land use changes upstream of Lower Pool 4 can also contribute to additional sedimentation in the UMR.

Are there ways to prevent sediment from entering Robinson Lake?

- Project features such as sediment deflectors can reduce sediment input into specific areas.

What is the purpose of the islands? Are the islands designed to influence the depths of the surrounding areas? Do the islands create an area to scour/maintain depth for fishes?

- The islands provide terrestrial habitat for wildlife and a base for terrestrial vegetation to grow. They also provide depth diversity and can act as barriers for wind-wave erosion to reduce sediment resuspension.

What is the study area?

- The study area is Robinson Lake on the Minnesota side of the Mississippi River main channel. The area includes Hershey Island at the north down to the LP4 WMA at the south end.

We saw a map that included islands, possibly from a few years ago. Are those islands being considered?

- The 2020 Fact Sheet does include some initial potential concepts for islands in Robinson Lake. The team is still the process of developing potential features. The features from the Fact Sheet are considered but may not necessarily be included in features for this study. We're starting with just the study area footprint in the maps and the design will progress using the study goals and objectives.

What amount of the sediment is from decaying vegetation? There is a lot of vegetation in Robinson Lake and the material is very mucky. Could this be from the decaying vegetation?

- In Pool 4, downstream of the Chippewa River, sediments are coarse and sandy. USACE plans to collect soil samples in Robinson Lake as part of the planning process. These soil samples can be tested for organic content (i.e., higher organic content means more vegetation).
- Sedimentation rates and sources have been studied by USGS as part of the Long Term Resource Monitoring (LTRM) under the Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) Program. The following reports are used during the planning and design process.
 - Rogala, J.R., J. Kalas, and R.M. Burdis. 2020. Rates and Patterns of Net Sedimentation From 1997-2017 in Backwaters of Pools 4 and 8 of the Upper Mississippi River. LTRM-2018ST4.
 - Net sedimentation rates in backwaters of the UMR (including Pool 4) estimated by measuring bed elevation changes between 1997 and 2017.
 - Rogala, J.R., F.A. Fitzpatrick, J.S. Hendrickson. 2020. Recent planform changes in the Upper Mississippi River. LTRM-2019GC8.
 - Indicated that sediment conditions in UMR can be caused by "regulated flows, constructed agricultural levees and navigation dams, altered land use in the watershed, and climate change."

What are USFWS objectives for the project?

- The USFWS manages the wildlife refuge. Goals are focused on both fish and wildlife resources and multiple habitat types. Their objectives align with their goals for the refuge.

If the bathymetry was collected during high water (April 2023) won't it show deeper depths than typical?

- Although the bathymetry data was collected during highwater, the data included in the maps is adjusted to depths at the Low Control Pool (LCP) elevation which is the lowest allowable water surface elevation according to the Lock and Dam 4 Water Control Manual.

Ducks rely on shallow habitat for feeding and Robinson Lake is a good area for duck hunting. Robinson Lake has a lot of shallow area that covers a large total surface area of water in the lake. Would creating islands affect this amount of surface area of water and aquatic habitat?

- The project will look to balance benefits for both fish and wildlife habitat. Considerations of important areas for duck habitat and duck hunting and fish habitat and fishing are important for us to understand the study area.

How do you make decisions on the project?

- The Corps is going through a feasibility study which will include developing alternatives, evaluating those alternatives for habitat benefits and estimated cost comparisons, tentatively selecting a recommended plan, then publishing the draft and final feasibility report (including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through documents such as Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Statements, or categorical exclusions. This is all done before further detailed design moves forward.
- The agency team includes USFWS, MN DNR, and WI DNR, which provide input on decisions.

Will the public have another opportunity to meet/discuss before a decision is made?

- The draft feasibility report and NEPA document will be provided to the public for review. The Corps will hold another public meeting to solicit input on the draft documents.

Does the project include shoreline and erosion protection? Does that include the shorelines along the landside (Minnesota) sides of Robinson Lake? Would features include preventing erosion of shoreline on Teepeota Point?

- Shoreline protection is a feature that has been considered in HREP projects and could be included in this project.

Would a Public-Private-Partnership be available for the project? Is there potential for private landowners to dredge the material and the project use the material for island buildings?

- The project authorization and funding from Congress, which directs how and how much the Corps spends, are for fish and wildlife habitat. Additional benefits may occur in the area such as reduced sedimentation into the area or channels dredged for access. However, the direct objective of the project is for habitat restoration focusing on fish and wildlife.

Do flows move from the north to the east and back out into the main channel? If islands are created in the middle of the lake, could they cut off areas south of the islands and exacerbate the problems at the southern end of the study area?

- Generally, flows do move from the north to the east and back out into the main channel. Yes - if the islands are not placed appropriately, it could cause adverse effects in the project area. The team will consider the orientation and location of islands during the planning process. A hydraulic model will be used to assess these features comparing both existing and with-project conditions.