

Memorandum for the Record

July 31, 2003

Subject: **Mississippi River Headwaters ROPE Study – Leech Lake
Volunteer Citizens Group Meeting, July 31, 2003**

1. On July 31, 2003, the Leech Lake Volunteer Citizens Group Meeting was held at Margarita Mulligans near Whipholt, MN from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. An invitation was provided to all attendees from the initial Leech Lake Group Meeting. Attendees representing the Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) – Fisheries, MN DNR – Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Leech Lake Association (LLA), Tri-County Leech Lake Watershed Project (TCLLWP), and Corps of Engineers (COE) personnel from the Leech Lake Dam and Recreation Area participated (see the roster on page 5 for a listing of the attendees).

2. The focus of the meeting was to obtain specific inputs for incorporation into the planning models that will be used to analyze and improve the Headwaters system-wide reservoir operations, particularly the Leech Lake Watershed. A secondary purpose of the meeting was to keep the group updated about the progress being made toward completion of the ROPE study. The specific agenda used for this meeting is attached. Issues and items of noteworthy discussion at the meeting follow:

- Timm Rennecke, Leech Lake Resource Manager, gave a brief overview of the overall status of the ROPE study. The overview included the following statements:
 1. The study is now being jointly sponsored by the COE and USFS.
 2. Good Progress is being made to use the Prescriptive Reservoir Model (PRM) and a STELLA simulation model for the formulation and evaluation of alternative plans.
 3. The Citizen Group, Tribal, and Task Force inputs into these models will be obtained over the next 6 to 8 months.
 4. A screening of alternatives report should be completed within the next year.
 5. More details about the ROPE Study are available at our web site at www.mvp.usace.army.mil/finder/display.asp?pageid=143
- There was an overview of historical COE operations concerning water levels on Leech Lake. The overview included three handouts: Handout #2 illustrated the natural water levels of Leech Lake from 1930 to 2000, Handout #3 showed historical Leech Lake elevations from 1885 through July 11, 2003, and Handout #4 illustrated Leech Lake levels from January 1998 through June 2003.
- Discussion followed the overview of the water level handouts, and the group concluded that the environment was their primary concern regarding Leech Lake water level management.

- The group stressed that the ROPE study must determine what effects lake levels have on aquatic vegetation, and what effects Leech Lake operating plans have on aquatic vegetation.
- Pat Rivers, the Leech Lake large lake specialist for the MN DNR, mentioned the positive effects the Pool 8 drawdown had on its aquatic vegetation.
- John Steward, TCELLWP, stated that they need to know the “floor” to determine how far the lake could be drawn down before aquatic vegetation, fish and wildlife damage occurs.
- The group agreed that there is a perception that aquatic vegetation is declining in Leech Lake, and that it is not desirable. There was also discussion that fishing success is on a declining trend, and questions are being raised if current water level operations have anything to do with it. Other environmental concerns of the group are Rusty Crayfish and Cormorants in Leech Lake. These undesirable species appear to be more abundant in recent years.
- The group is concerned regarding negative impacts of high water levels during the summer such as shoreline erosion, water quality, property damage, and damage to riparian forests.
- The Leech Lake Group would like the ROPE to investigate increasing the flowage capacity downstream of the Leech Lake Dam. They would like to know what the stresses would be on the Leech River, and the Mississippi River down to Aitkin. It is understood that Leech Lake Dam is sometimes operated for flood control in Aitkin, but Jane VanHunnik, MHB, asked if the land values surrounding Leech Lake have surpassed those of farmland near Aitkin. If so, the value of the shoreline property should be of more importance than that of the farmland.
- There was discussion that there is a need for a low-flow plan from downstream interests, so that they do not negatively affect upstream interests.

3. The group was asked to rate various water-related activities to determine their importance and also to list a range of preferred water elevations regarding each activity. The following table illustrates the group’s conclusions. This handout is referred to as “Handout 5 – Format for Citizen Volunteer Group Inputs.”

Handout 5 – Format for Citizen Volunteer Group Inputs

Check if applies	On-Water Uses and Operational Purpose Categories and Uses	Scaling of Use or Importance (1-5 rating with 1 being most important)	Range of Preferred Elevations for Activity or Use (compare to normal pool)	Remarks Variations on Connected Smaller Lakes (or river reaches)
	Recreation Category:			
X	Water Skiing	3	94.70-94.90	No Impact
X	Boating for Pleasure	1	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Jet Skiing	5	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Boat Fishing	1	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Bank Fishing	1	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Houseboating	4	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Sailing	3	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Waterfowl Observation	2	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Swimming	2	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Ricing (wild rice harvest)	1	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Ice Fishing	1	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Waterfowl Hunting	1	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Trapping	3	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	On-Lake Snomobiling	2	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Ice Boating	5	94.40-94.90	No Impact
X	Wind Surfing	4	94.40-94.90	No Impact
	Other			

Handout 5 – Format for Citizen Volunteer Group Inputs (cont)

Check if applies	On-Water Uses and Operational Purpose Categories and Uses	Scaling of Use or Importance (1-5 rating with 1 being most important)	Unacceptable Threshold Elevations for Activity or Use (compare to normal pool)	Remarks Variations on Connected Smaller Lakes (or river reaches)
	Flooding Category:			
X	Private and Commercial Lands and Structures	1	Defer to task groups	<i>Identify key properties</i>
X	Public Lands and Structures	1	Defer to task groups	<i>Identify specific structures</i>
	Erosion Category:			
X	Private and Commercial Lands and Structures	1	1295.00	<i>Identify key properties</i>
X	Public Lands and Structures	1	1295.00	<i>Identify specific structures</i>
	Natural / Environmental Category:			
X	For Fisheries	1	Defer to task groups	<i>Identify species present</i>
X	For Wildfowl	1	Defer to task groups	<i>Identify species</i> *Ducks *Loons *Terns (LL tribe)
X	Wild Rice Production	1	Defer to task groups	For harvesting and for fish/wildlife
X	Other: <u>Furbearer</u>	1	Defer to task groups	*Muskrats *Otter *Mink *Beaver
X	Other: <u>Aquatic Vegetation</u>	1	Defer to task groups	
X	Other: <u>Riparian Areas</u>	1	Defer to task groups	

4. The meeting was very constructive. All attendees openly participated in discussions, and the group reached decisions as a whole. The table below lists each person in attendance, the respective organization, and telephone number.

ROSTER		
NAME	ORGANIZATION	TELEPHONE
Timm Rennecke	COE – Leech Lake Dam	218-654-3145
Jason Hauser	COE – Leech Lake Dam	218-654-3145
Jane VanHunnik	MHB	218-547-7263
Pat Rivers	MN DNR	
David Morley	USFS – Walker	218-547-1044
Don Pierce	MN DNR	218-327-4429
John Steward	TCLLWP	218-547-1770
Jim Lohr	LLA	218-547-1501
Jerry McCauley	LLA	218-836-2076
Jack Shaffer	TCLLWP	218-363-3817

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Timm Rennecke
Resource Manager, Leech Lake Dam