

Public Meetings for Lake Butte des Morts Habitat Restoration Projects Scheduled for March

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OSHKOSH, Wis. - The Butte des Morts Conservation Club, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department will hold two public meetings in March regarding proposed habitat restoration efforts at Samers Bay and Terrell Island on Lake Butte des Morts.

The first public meeting will be held Wednesday, March 11, at Omro Town Hall, 4205 Rivermoor Road, Omro. The second public meeting is set for Thursday, March 12, at the JP Coughlin Center, 625 E. County Road Y, Oshkosh. Each meeting will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Historically, marsh and wetland areas located throughout Lake Butte des Morts supported some of the most productive fish and wildlife areas on the Winnebago System. However, deterioration of protective marsh edges and decreases in water clarity since the late 1950s has resulted in dramatic vegetation losses and declining fish and wildlife habitat throughout the Upriver Lakes.

The main objectives of the proposed restoration efforts include creating better water quality and increasing vegetation growth to provide critical fish and wildlife habitat. The proposed Samers Bay project would include installing an off-shore breakwall in Samers Bay on Lake Butte des Morts. Since 1941, the shoreline at Samers Bay has receded an average of 8-9 feet per year, which equates to 93 acres of wetland loss to date. The proposed breakwall would be 5,850 feet in length, with 35-foot openings every 500 feet. The project will protect against shoreline erosion and restore an estimated 111 acres of wetland habitat.

The proposed Terrell Island project would include creating a substantial 2,200-foot opening on the east side of the Terrell Island breakwall. The rock material that is removed to create the opening will be reused to begin building the new Samers Bay breakwall. This opening in the Terrell Island breakwall will create water exchange within the structure that should help to improve long-term water quality problems and reestablish use by desirable fish and wildlife species within the 569-acre Terrell's Island Habitat Restoration Area. This project will help reestablish the original goals of the Terrell Island property management plan, including:

- Protection of Lake Butte des Morts and the Winnebago Pool Watershed;
- Protection and restoration of the plant communities and fish and wildlife habitat; and
- Allowing public access for recreational purposes.

This is a multi-agency and stakeholder project that meets Winnebago Pool habitat restoration goals and objectives for various agencies. In addition, improving fish and wildlife habitat at Samers Bay and Terrell's Island will provide better recreational opportunities for the public, including fishing, hunting, canoeing, kayaking and wildlife viewing.

Members of the public are encouraged to attend the meetings to learn more about the project and provide input. Meetings will also include a question and answer session to provide those in attendance the opportunity to ask questions regarding the proposed habitat restoration projects.

If you are unable to attend the meetings in person but would like to provide input, please contact Adam Nickel at adam.nickel@wisconsin.gov or 920-424-3059.