



OSS�PEE LAKE ALLIANCE

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July 13, 2016

Mr. Chester Kwiatowski
Planning Board
Mr. Stanley Brothers
Zoning Board of Adjustment
Town of Ossipee
Ossipee, NH 03814

Gentlemen:

We are concerned about misinformation about flooding issues being circulated by the owners of Westward Shores and SFC Engineering. We believe the town should require the developers to provide a comprehensive flooding risk assessment report before ruling on the merits of their expansion plan.

The latest example of misleading information is Northgate CEO Zachery Bossenbroek's statement in the *Conway Daily Sun* downplaying concerns about flooding. He calls such concerns "way overblown," and claims the damaging flood of 1998 was due to "mismanagement" of the dam, and that there have been no other "material floods" since the state took over dam management in 1999.

His statements are easily refuted by facts. In regard to the 1998 flood, 17 inches of rain fell from June 13 to 15, raising the lake from the managed summer level of 407.25 ft. to 412.63 ft. Boats, docks, and parts of the shoreline went down the river, and it took weeks for the lake to recede. That wasn't the result of dam mismanagement; it was a freak of nature.

But as Ossipee residents, you know that such freaks of nature are not uncommon on the lake. In a 2007 newsletter article, Bob Smart, who has studied the history of the dam and charted the lake's water level for years, said similarly destructive floods took place in 1969 and 1976. Lake residents recall a major flood in 1990, and very high water in August 2011 in the wake of Hurricane Irene. In October 2005 more than 11 inches of rain fell on the lake in a short span of time, but flooding damage was limited because the lake had been drained to its lowest winter level early that year to allow property owners and businesses to make repairs to the shoreline. Dumb luck had prevented another major flood.

State and local officials are excellent at managing the Ossipee River Dam. But State Dam Bureau official Dan Mattaini is clear that a proper physical plant and good management can only help reduce flooding, not prevent it. That's because the lake is fed by three major rivers (and three smaller ones) and the channels connecting the big lake with the bays create a series of natural bottlenecks that impede the flow of water to the lake's only point of egress, the Ossipee River. Even with the gates wide open, the dam can process only so much water at any given time.

The state's natural mean high water mark for the lake is 407.25 ft. When heavy rains fall or there is substantial spring melting (or both) the water backs up and the lake floods. For example, in May 2006 the lake level hit 411.66 ft. In April 2007 the water level was over 411 ft. for four days and peaked at 412.17. In April 2010 the water level hit 411.40 ft. At these levels, all low-lying areas are inundated with water; that is, they are "flooded."

DES provided these statistics to SFC Engineering in February. So either they didn't make their way from SFC to Mr. Bossenbroek or he has chosen to ignore them in favor of a narrative in which "better dam management" has eliminated the threat of flooding. In either case, your boards and the public are being misled about a significant issue.

Why is it significant? The town has been tasked with determining whether to accept the applicant's assurances that in times of high water their septic system won't fail; RVs and buildings won't float away; and residents can be evacuated quickly and efficiently. We have no expertise in evaluating these issues, but we feel strongly that they cannot be addressed properly without a baseline understanding of flooding.

At what lake level is Westward Shores invaded by water and how often does that occur? As far as we know, the applicant has not provided this information to the town even though it seems to us to be a fundamental question relative to their application and the assurances they have provided. Fortunately it should not be difficult to provide a fact-based answer to this question by using topographical maps, simple modeling, and the Dam Bureau's archive of water level data.

For example, let's hypothesize 410 ft. as a starting point for an investigation. At almost three feet higher than the managed summer water level, it seems logical that low-lying Westward Shores would be flooded. Coincidentally, 410 ft. is the state's former benchmark for the lake's natural mean high water mark. We know from the debate over lowering the benchmark that the Peninsula is one of the lake's shorefront properties that is less than 410 ft. in elevation.

But whether 410 is the right starting point (or whether it should be higher or lower), knowing the level at which the campground is invaded by water and how often that occurs is the only way for the town to understand how many times annually the applicant's assurances about there being no impact from flooding will be put to the test. Once the flooding benchmark is established, the Dam Bureau's database can be used to determine all instances of flooding and the town will be able to make a reasonable assessment of flooding probabilities and impact.

We think this kind of flooding risk assessment is essential and should be required of the applicant before the town rules on the merits of the expansion plan. We share the public's expressions of concern that the application should receive the highest level of scrutiny and the applicant and its agents should be held to a high standard of truthfulness and transparency. Glib comments about flooding that have no basis in fact do a disservice to the town and the public. Common sense suggests that establishing a flooding model using specific metrics based on historical data should be a requirement.

Regards,



Susan Marks

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cc:
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