

## PRESS RELEASE: TMCD Recommendation for Whitewater Lake

Whitewater Lake is one of Manitoba's most productive wetlands. The lake is a large shallow terminal basin, meaning that under normal conditions the lake has no natural outlet and water leaves the watershed only by seepage or evaporations. The lake was designated as a Wildlife Management Area by the provincial government and is a Candidate Heritage Marsh under the Manitoba Heritage Marsh Program. Until this last year, the lake never had an outlet. In 2011, under extremely wet conditions, the lake reached levels where it spilled into the Medora Creek.

In December 2011, TMCD hosted a public consultation meeting to look into possible solutions to flooding around Whitewater Lake. During this meeting the Conservation District collected a total of 38 completed worksheets and compiled the results. Flooding of agricultural lands received the highest priority ranking, followed by flooding of infrastructure, problems with increasing drainage, flooding from streams and lakes, natural areas, soil loss/erosion, and water storage. Participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a proposed Whitewater Lake outlet project to Medora Creek. The majority of the written responses received from the public were in favour of the establishment of the proposed outlet on Whitewater Lake; however the majority of worksheets were completed by landowners around Whitewater Lake (68%). Of the seven municipalities that were surveyed, two municipalities were opposed to the Medora Creek outlet, two were positively affected, two were negatively affected and one was split between their council. All comments from the Public Information Session have been included in a summary document that is available online on the TMCD website at [www.tmcd.ca](http://www.tmcd.ca).

Steve Topping, Executive Director with Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation presented on the proposed outlet for Whitewater Lake in December 2011. In his presentation the key elements he discussed were the cost of the project outweighing the benefit. If the proposed outlet channel (50 cfs) operates for one month it would reduce the lake level by less than 2 inches per month. He stated that an outlet has negligible effect on reducing the lake level in the spring of 2012. Evaporations from the lake would be more effective on lowering the lake than constructing an outlet. The Medora Creek would require 1.4 miles of upgrading from the lake and call for ongoing maintenance to control the siltation from Whitewater Lake. A copy of Steve Topping's presentation is available on the TMCD webpage.

The Conservation District investigated the Environment Licence process for a proposed outlet. Whitewater Lake would classify as a Class 2 Development due to the waterbody being greater than 200 dam<sup>3</sup> as identified in the Environment Act Classes of Development Regulation. There are four parts to the Environment Act Proposal: a cover letter, Environment Act Proposal Form, Reports/plans supporting the Environment Act Proposal and the Application Fee. For a class 2 development application there is a non-refundable fee of \$5,000. A requirement of the proposal is that federal, provincial and municipal approvals, licenses, permits, authorizations, etc must be granted.

Through facilitated exercise, consultations with municipalities, and the public and based on the landscape conditions stated above, the Watershed Planning Authority for the East Souris River Watershed recommended the following management within this area to address concerns of flooding around Whitewater Lake.

*"Whitewater Lake is a natural closed watershed that has been impacted by natural and man-made drainage. Instead of an outlet, we recommend resources should focus on reversing the trend of upstream drainage. We also recommend an adequate long-term compensation package for flooded landowners. Treat the cause not the symptom." TMCD Board.*

Recommended options and actions suitable for this area and the responsible lead organization include:

1. A compensation program for those impacted landowners, including longer terms for compensation during extreme events (like 2011) (MAFRI, RMs),
2. Expand the TMCD Conservation Agreement program in the Whitewater Lake watershed focusing on preventing drainage of wetlands or clearing of forests, and the restoration of wetlands (TMCD, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Nature Conservancy Corporation (NCC)),
3. Seek external funding to develop an Ecological Goods and Services Program around Whitewater Lake to help alleviate some of the stress on local lake landowners between the elevation of 1628 and 1633 feet (TMCD),
4. Provide workshop and incentives for producers within the Whitewater Lake watershed that are going to drain to utilize drainage management practices that decrease surface runoff and increase absorption through soil, (TMCD)
5. Identification of all natural and manmade waterways flowing into Whitewater Lake, including an assessment of change in effective drainage area over the last 50 years (TMCD, DUC, Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship (MCWS))
6. Close all unlicensed drainage projects (MCWS),
7. Develop a system of user pay drainage to create a fund to pay for Ecological Goods and Services (TMCD, MCWS), and
8. Effective enforcement of drainage including increase fines for unlicensed or non-compliance (MCWS).

The Turtle Mountain Conservation District will be moving forward with the initial actions of an Ecological Goods and Services program for within the Whitewater Lake Watershed, a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives the Honourable Ron Kostyshyn regarding long term insurance for unseeded acres, a compensation program for impacted landowners and expanding the TMCD Conservation Agreement program.