



# Rest Lake Dam Draft Operating Order

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: The Rest Lake dam has been operating under the same orders since 1939. Why is change needed?**

**A:** DNR is charged with oversight of the Rest Lake dam under Chapter 31, Wisconsin Statutes. The agency is required to regulate water level and flow in the interest of public rights in navigable waters or to promote safety and protect life, health and property.

Few people realize that the current Rest Lake dam operations do not completely follow the 1939 orders. Regardless, change is needed. Current operations limit year-round navigability and recreational opportunities; unfairly restrict water flow to the river to refill the lake; harm the surrounding habitat, contribute to shoreline erosion and reduce spawning, nesting and breeding opportunities for wildlife.

### **Q: What are some of the problems caused by the current operation?**

**A:** The existing operations produce water flows that run counter to the natural water cycle. The dam releases a large rush of water in late fall to draw the lake down 3 ½ feet for winter. This produces downstream flooding while emptying the wetlands above the lake. Then, in spring, water flowing into the river and wetlands below the river is curtailed to refill the lake to its “full pool” depth. Fish including sturgeon, northern pike and muskellunge need more river flow in spring for optimum spawning.

Also under the current operations, early season navigation is curtailed while the lakes refill and landings sit above the low water levels. In some years, the lake never achieves full depth because the refill does not begin until the ice is off the water and the snow-melt has been lost. Meanwhile, property owners on the river are unfairly disadvantaged.

### **Q: So, how is the draft order better?**

**A:** The draft order balances environmental, recreational and long-term economic interests by establishing operations similar to other northern Wisconsin flowage systems including the Minocqua chain of lakes, the Eagle River chain, the Three Lakes chain and Twin Lakes (North and South Twin lakes). The year-round recreational opportunities on these chains sustain high property values and attract significant levels of investment to the surrounding communities. The more stable water levels on those lakes also reduce shoreline erosion, benefiting property owners.

From an environmental perspective, by limiting the winter drawdown to just 1 foot instead of 3 ½ feet, the draft order improves river and wetland health. Fish, reptiles and mammals will find safer places to spend the winter and better breeding habitat in the spring. After more than a decade of study, DNR has concluded the draft order will benefit the area’s economy and its natural resources.

### **Q: People are concerned that permanent structures like piers and boathouses are going to be damaged by ice as a result of the higher water levels. We’ve heard estimates that the new operating order could cost property owners millions of dollars. Is this true?**

**A:** It is true that some ice damage may occur, but with the current drawdown, the exposed shoreline is exposed to frost heaves that also cause damage. On other high-property value chains with permanent piers and historic boathouses, many homeowners opt to install aerators or protective pilings to minimize the potential for damage. These chains continue to enjoy high property values. Out of concern for property owners affected by the Rest Lake dam, the draft operating order provides for a one-year implementation delay.

In developing the draft order over the course of 10 years, DNR held numerous meetings with stakeholders and conducted an environmental assessment that included review of the concerns of property owners and local units of government with respect to property tax values and business activity. Recreational interests and other broad economic factors also were included. To ensure the agency has not missed any relevant economic or other information, three public information meetings are now being held along with an extended period for submitting written comments.

**Q: Can you offer any other details?**

**A:** More information on the draft order can be found at [DNR.wi.gov](http://DNR.wi.gov) by searching for “Rest Lake dam.” The summary below shows a comparison of the current and proposed operations.

		Draft Order	Current Operations
<b>Spring</b>	Refill period	Refill may begin before or after ice out	Following 75-100 percent of ice-out (~April 20) (1939 order – 7'3" by April 15)
	River release guidelines	Targeted public interest river flows based on calculated inflow at dam, 57 cubic feet per second (cfs) minimum flow.	40 cfs or more until chain is filled, then run of river (inflow = outflow)
<b>Summer</b>	Lake elevation	7'6" to 8'6"	8'2" to 8'6" (1939 order – 7'3" to 8'6")
	River release guidelines	Targeted public interest river flows based on calculated inflow at dam, 57 cfs minimum flow	40 cfs minimum
<b>Fall</b>	Drawdown time period	Completed by Oct. 15	Starts end of September, done early November on average.
	Drawdown rate	Not to exceed 1" per day	Not to exceed 2" per day
<b>Winter</b>	Lake elevation	7'6" (1' below full pool)	5' (3½' below full pool)

*DNR's public comment period for the Rest Lake Dam draft operating order extends through Sept. 5, 2014. Written comments may be emailed to [DNRRestLake@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DNRRestLake@Wisconsin.gov). Comments also may be mailed to DNR Service Center, 2501 Golf Course Road, Ashland, WI 54806, attn. John Spangberg. Environmental and economic comments provided by citizens and stakeholder groups during previous information-gathering stages of the project continue to inform the draft order process.*