

Candlewood Lake Residents Oppose Use of Chemicals

Katrina Koerting

March 4, 2017

NEW FAIRFIELD—For nearly three hours, dozens of residents around Candlewood Lake spoke against a proposal to use herbicides and algaecides to treat Eurasian watermilfoil and blue-green algae, both of which have plagued the lake for years.

More than 150 residents filled the cafeteria at Meeting House Hill School to comment and learn about the proposal drafted by Solitude Lake Management, a consulting company that addressed lake issues at a September forum organized by First Selectman Susan Chapman.

A permit must be approved by the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection before the program can proceed.

“DEEP should deny (the permit) bas on the will of the people, and the health and environmental concerns,” said Scott Randall, a Sherman man who started an online petition against the proposal in January.

Most of the concerns focused on health risks and possible negative effects the chemicals would have on the environment.

Residents criticized the selectmen for not consulting property owners, the other lake towns or the Candlewood Lake Authority before signing the agreement.

They said the \$30,000 selectmen set aside to help cover most of the \$52,400 application cost was approved by 14 voters at a town meeting to cover Candlewood Lake studies, not this program.

Under the proposal, the company would apply a herbicide with Diquot in mid-May to about 50 acres in Town Park Cove and 10 acres in Shelter Harbor Cove to treat the watermilfoil. It would make up to four applications of copper sulfate to treat the algae, or cyanobacteria, when a bloom occurs or is about to occur.

Ken Wagner, a consultant hired by New Fairfield, started the meeting by saying the proposed methods have risks that needed to be weighed against the rewards. He said the amounts of chemicals are low enough to reduce those risks.

“Please don’t twist the science to say someone is trying to poison the lake,” he said.

Marc Bellaud, of Solitude Lake Management, said the program would demonstrate if the chemicals can work well with the sterile grass carp, which were introduced in 2015 to eat the milfoil. It will also test if the carp will eat more of the milfoil that grows after the chemical is applied.

He said the chemicals are very commonly used in Connecticut and nearby lakes, though not with the sterile grass carp.

Town officials have said the chemicals would assist the fish in controlling the milfoil, not replacing them, but many speakers were concerned the chemicals, especially the copper would kill the carp.

Most asked officials to give the carp time to be effective, which generally take two to four years.

The state approved 3,800 carp in the initial stocking, and DEEP officials announced at Thursday’s meeting it would approve another 3,000 fish this year, bringing the total to the preferred ration of 15 fish per acre of



milfoil.

Peter Aarrestad, director of the DEEP’s fisheries division, said they stocked fewer at first because they wanted to address initial concerns in the first year, such as whether the fish would escape.

Phyllis Schaer, chairwoman of Candlewood Lake Authority, said the chemical solution was a reaction to symptoms rather than causes, adding they should allow the carp program to work.

“If you plant an orchard and don’t get apples the first year, you don’t cut down all of the trees,” she said.

She added the two treatment sties are stocking areas, and this program would prevent them from putting fish there.

Pat Delmonico, chairwoman of the town’s Inland and Wetlands Commission, said the commission unanimously opposed the proposal saying it was counterproductive to add it so soon after the carp were introduced to the lake. She said not enough research exists to show the chemicals wouldn’t harm the carp.

Other speakers said they were worried about adding the chemical to the water in the event the lake was needed as a reservoir, which Danbury is considering because of drought conditions, and the chemicals could affect the wells around the lake.

Some speakers questioned the science behind the chemicals safety. Consultants and the DEEP official in charge of the permit process said studies done as part of the Environmental Protection Agency’s registration process confirmed the science. Diquot was last registered in the 1990s, though it has been used since the 1960s.

A few speakers favored the proposal, including John Hodge, a New Fairfield delegate on the Candlewood Lake Authority.

“Sometimes you need to use the proper chemicals in the appropriate amounts to get better,” he said, comparing it to chemotherapy.

DEEP will receive comments for two weeks after the application is received. Comments can be emailed to deep.pesticidepermitting@ct.gov.

Lyle doesn't harvest the entire lake, there is a no cut area where they don't cut at all. Plus, there are certain things that Lyle doesn't cut. "We're not allowed to cut wild rice and we don't cut bulrushes, we don't cut lily pads," explains Lyle. "We don't cut them because that's part of it, DNR doesn't want to and the sunfish are in the lily pads."

The board has heard the suggestion of controlling the weeds by using chemicals instead of the weed harvester. The cost of the chemicals is very prohibitive though. "It was \$250,000 dollars and we had to treat it for the first 5 years twice a year," says Steve. "So it'd be a half million dollars." Compared to approximately \$25,000 a year it takes to run the weed harvester.

The work required to run the weed harvester is immense. "There's a lot of hours donated by the board members and volunteers," says Lyle. "We have some real good young board members now."

"Real go-getters," adds Steve. And those go-getters are really needed with the current economic climate. "Prices go up, donation go down," says Steve. Even the price of the annual permit has gone up. "A few years ago it was under \$20, now it's \$400."

Of course, the cost of running and maintaining the weed harvester itself is also increasing. "The one we've got, it's probably '87 when it was built," Lyle says. "So we do a lot of maintenance on it."

The biggest fundraiser that LMA has every year is it's Labor Day weekend garage sale. They are currently collecting donations of quality items (excluding clothing) every Saturday morning, 9:00 a.m. until noon at their garage. By the time of the sale, the large garage is usually packed full of items. "We are a non profit organization so all donations to the sale are tax deductible," says Greg.

This year they are adding one more fund raiser that will be held at Bann's on August 20 from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. This event will include a beanbag tournament and lots of great prizes, including Twins and Wild tickets and a four person hot air balloon ride.

The association will be holding their annual meeting soon and that is a great place for people to go and hear exactly what the weed harvester is all about. The meeting will be at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 13 at the Minnewawa Sportsmen's Club.