Debate over how to raise water level of Little Wall Lake

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Residents around [Little Wall Lake](http://www.mycountyparks.com/county/Hamilton/Park/Little-Wall-Lake-Park.aspx) near Jewell met with state officials Tuesday to talk about raising the lake’s water level. Jane Todey, who attended the meeting, has lived on the shore of Little Wall Lake for 27 years.

“It’s actually the southern-most glacial lake in Iowa,” Todey says. The 256-acre lake is a “shallow saucer” according to Todey.

“Because it was very shallow, it had been dredged in the ’50s and it was dredged again in 2002 by the Department of Natural Resources and it made the lake a little bit deeper, but the water level because of the drought has been going down and down and down,” Todey says.

Back in 2002 after dredging made the lake deeper, residents around the lake raised money to pump water from nearby Mud Creek into a containment area that filtered back into Little Wall Lake.

“And we raised the level with that $50,000 and volunteers, we raised it about three feet and made the lake usable again,” Todey says, “so after this drought started and the water began to go down again we applied for a permit to do the same thing again and we were denied.”

Kevin Baskins of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources says Mud Creek is not a good source of water because it has “very high levels” of phosphorus.“So really what you’re doing is you’re pumping something into the lake that would be undesirable in the long run because once you get excess phosphorus into a lake system that creates more algae blooms and kind of that stained water that we would like to get rid of in our lake systems as much as possible,” Baskins says.

Little Wall Lake has one of the lowest levels of phosphorus of any lake in Iowa today. Plus, Baskins says natural drought cycles are healthy for lakes because plants that filter out farm chemicals that drain into the lake can get established on exposed parts of the lake bed. “If the plants in the lake are using that nitrogen and that phosphorus, then the water will remain clearer,” Baskins says.

Residents around the lake like Todey says low water levels are a safety issue and they’re pressing state officials to consider other water sources, like an abandoned gravel pit nearby.“The lake looks large, but it is very shallow and in a lot of cases you might be 100 feet or further from the shore and your propeller will hit the bottom of the lake because it is so shallow,” Todey says, “so with speed boats or jet skis and people that don’t understand the depth problems there, they could get injured.” Todey describes Tuesday’s meeting in Des Moines with state officials as “very positive.”

The DNR’s spokesman says Little Wall Lake is one of several of the state’s lakes are below average water levels because of the drought.

“We’re certainly open to working with the people up there to find some solutions that may work for them,” Baskins says.

More meetings will be held with residents around the lake to discuss ways to raise the lake level, but dates for those meetings have not been set.

“We want to make sure that whatever we’re doing for the lake from a quantity standpoint is not going to be detrimental from a quality standpoint,” Baskins says.

Little Wall Lake is about two miles south of Jewell, in Hamilton County.