



June 18, 2014

Mercer Lake, Oneida Co. WI Public Boat Access Proposal Frequently Asked Questions

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is exploring the potential for developing public motor boat access to Mercer Lake on state-owned land. Mercer Lake is a 257-acre drainage lake with 23 feet maximum depth, and contains naturally reproducing populations of muskellunge, walleye, northern pike, bass and panfish. It is the goal of the state of Wisconsin to provide, maintain and improve access to the state's navigable lakes, rivers and streams for the public. Private resort access exists on Mercer Lake, but there are no public boat ramps. Public access to Mercer Lake currently consists of an unsafe carry-in location at the Mercer Creek culvert, and undeveloped walk-in access across state land.

Why select Mercer Lake for access development, and why now? It is the goal of the state of Wisconsin to provide, maintain and improve access to the state's navigable lakes, rivers and streams for the public. In 1970, DNR purchased a 54-acre parcel that includes over 3,000 feet of water-front along Mercer Lake. One reason for the purchase was for public access to Mercer Lake, but the property was landlocked at the time. In early 1980s, DNR sold a 66-wide road easement to Town of Minocqua to allow road access to several lake lots on the west boundary of the DNR property. Part of the DNR's justification for granting this road easement was that the road would permit development of a public access to Mercer Lake. Bosacki Road was constructed in early 1980s, but lake-access development was delayed due to lack of funds, and was not re-initiated until recently. The DNR was criticized in recent years by the Wisconsin State Legislature for failing to properly develop and maintain existing properties. Access development at Mercer Lake helps address this criticism.

Why did DNR recently post the property boundaries at this site? The recent posting is unrelated to development of boat access. Better posting of state-owned properties was mandated in recent years by Wisconsin State Legislature. In response, many DNR properties across the state are receiving increased signage.

When will development happen? Staff began the current public access process on the Mercer Lake parcel in 2010. In 2013, Chequamegon Bay Engineering was hired to delineate wetlands and perform detailed elevation surveys. These results were used by a DNR Engineer to draft two versions of a site development plan. Once a site development plan is finalized, it will be submitted to the DNR Boat Committee for consideration alongside other statewide public access proposals. If it is selected for funding, then it could be let out for bids as early as the 2017-18 biennium. Construction typically starts about 1.5 years after funding.

What type of development is being proposed? Public boating access development for a 247-acre lake is defined as one or more trailered boat access sites which provide parking for 9 to 17 car-trailer units and one additional handicap-accessible space.

Is this the best development location on Mercer Lake? Staff investigated 3 locations within a 54-acre DNR-owned parcel. Site A was right along the property boundary with an adjacent landowner, with little space for a ramp, turnaround and parking due to nearby wetlands and a steep hill. Site B required multiple wetland crossings to get to the lakeshore, and little space for parking and turnaround due to wetlands and hills. Site C was selected as the best option to isolate the development from neighbors, minimize wetland impacts and provide reasonable parking.

Are there rare, threatened or endangered species in this area? The Natural Heritage Inventory database identified one rare species at the site, and two state-listed species within a mile of the site. Further work is needed on-site to determine whether rare species are present and potential impacts of development.

Are there wetlands in this area? Engineers are creating two draft site development plans at site C which call for either 2,000 ft² (plan 1) or 820 ft² (plan 2) of wetland fill.

What environmental permits are required? This activity is governed by Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act. Wetland fill and ramp placement require permits or approvals from Oneida County, DNR and US Army Corps of Engineers. Grading over 10,000 ft² requires a DNR stormwater permit. Permits can be applied for after a final site development plan is drafted.

Will development affect natural scenic beauty? Suitable parking at the Mercer site is set well back from the lake, which will help screen vehicles from the lake. The ramp approach and turnaround will require shoreline tree cutting and development, with more trees impacted but less wetland fill under site development plan 2.

Does having public access affect the eligibility of Mercer Lake to receive state services? Lakes without adequate public boating access are not eligible to receive resource enhancement services such as fish surveys and stocking. Access is an important ranking factor in lake planning and AIS control grants.

How much will this cost and who pays for it? Cost estimates vary depending on the final plan, and on the results of the competitive bid process. The draft site development proposals being considered at the July 12, 2014 meeting have an estimated cost of \$250,000 to \$300,000. Likely funding sources include a combination of state Recreational Boating Funds and federal Sport Fish Restoration funds, and projects compete for these funds on a statewide competitive basis.

How does the cost compare to other access sites in the area? City of Rhinelander in 2013 was awarded grants covering 80% of approximately \$495,000 to build a new ramp with parking for 22 vehicles with trailers and 7 additional vehicles for 650-acre Hat Rapids Flowage. DNR renovated existing ramps and parking areas on Crescent Lake (\$237,000) and George Lake (\$56,000) in 2006.

Request information, or submit comments during July 12 to August 1, 2014 using one of these options:

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