

## Topic: Water Level Control on Chippewa Lake

March 27, 2024

The water level in Chippewa Lake is a concern to many water sports enthusiasts. Just a couple of inches in variation either up or down can bring on many problems. There is also a lot of misinformation about how the lake level is maintained and what or what cannot be done to maintain the proper level.

First, Water level in Chippewa Lake is set by a State of Michigan Court Order and is the responsibility of The Mecosta County Drain Commission to monitor and adjust when they deem necessary.

Unlike many lakes that have a river or major creek feeding it, Chippewa Lake does not. Chippewa Lake is dependent on precipitation and springs to replenish any water that has evaporated or has drained off into Chippewa Creek.

During major precipitation events such as a spring storm, the water level of the lake may rise significantly. Normally excess water flows over the dam located near the south/east end of the lake and drains into the creek. When the maximum level of the lake cannot be maintained in this process, Mecosta County Drain Commission may adjust the dam to allow a greater flow of water out of the lake. This is very important not only to maintain the State set directive but more importantly because there are many structures near the lake that are very close to the level of the lake for instance, many structures, yards and roads near Pickeral Point at the south end of the lake can experience flooding with just a few inches of high-water levels.

Mecosta County Drain Commission doesn't have the only say in high water level conditions. Beavers frequently build dams in Chippewa Creek and can reduce flow out of the lake. Another duty of the Drain Commission is to reduce the effect of the beaver dams mostly by utilizing trappers and when necessary, remove beaver dams.

However low water conditions cannot be controlled by the State of Michigan or Mecosta County Drain Commission. As previously mentioned, Chippewa Lake receives water by precipitation (rain and snow) and by underwater springs. When evaporation exceeds the amount of water that the rain or springs provide, the water level will drop. 2023 was a perfect example of this where persistent drought like conditions in the Spring and Summer caused the water level to drop significantly. The effect was so great that many Riparians did not have sufficient clearance under their boats to use them for a period of time.

A question we often get asked is "Why don't you just raise the dam level?" The fact is: In low water conditions, the water isn't even reaching the top of the dam structure, so adding to the height of the dam structure will not make a difference. So, we are stuck until we get a significant rain event.

I hope this explanation has been helpful in your understanding of the fluctuating water levels of our lake. If you have any questions, please contact Bryan at [bryan@chippewatwp.org](mailto:bryan@chippewatwp.org), Julie at [Julie@Chippewatwp.org](mailto:Julie@Chippewatwp.org), or Kristin at [Kristin@Chippewatwp.org](mailto:Kristin@Chippewatwp.org) or by calling the Chippewa Township offices at 231-867-3777.