

# CRANES

## Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability

*On behalf of its member organizations and individuals, advocating collaboratively for the environment of the South Central Wisconsin region (eight counties: Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Rock and Sauk) toward a high quality of life; an ecologically sustainable and just culture; and, the celebration of the beauty of this place, both natural and built.*

### VISION

*The Capital area's environment, including water, land, and air resources, will be conserved or restored to ensure the region's quality of life and the beauty of this special place, for all who live or visit here, now and in the future.*

### INTERIM STEERING GROUP

*Gary Werner, President  
Phyllis Hasbrouck, Vice-Pres.  
Caryl Terrell, Secretary  
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Fiscal Agent  
River Alliance of Wisconsin  
A Tax-exempt 501(c)3 Non-profit  
WisconsinRivers.org

22 March 2010

*Yahara Lake Level Advisory Group 2  
c/o Mindy Habecker*

UW Extension Dane County Office Cooperative Extension  
1 Fen Oak Court / Room 138  
Madison, WI 53718-8812

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Dear YLLAG2 members:

In advance of your meeting of 24 March 2011, the *Capital Area Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability* (CRANES) requests that the *Yahara Lake Level Advisory Group 2* (YLLAG2) make restoration of shoreline vegetation in the Yahara Watershed, with native plants, a top priority going forward.

We urge beginning this effort with a focus on the Lake Mendota subwatershed, including restoration of the marsh along the estuary of the Yahara River and its course thence northward to its headwaters. Over 400 acres of marsh vegetation have been lost in these areas. Barrier islands that spanned the estuary where the Yahara River flows into Lake Mendota have also been lost, eliminating an historically significant four-season Native American footpath.

Shoreline Vegetation Restoration is one of the EPA's top two policy initiatives for improving water quality, by reducing the effects of stormwater runoff. The environmental benefits for habitat are perhaps even more important.

Current Lake Mendota ecological conditions are importantly influenced by construction of dams at Tenney Park, which after the 1830s, raised the natural lake level at least 4.5 feet. This unnaturally high lake level prevents restoration of the vegetation needed for environmental sustainability.

So we ask that YLLAG2 advocate for the following related public policy initiatives:

- o Create a comprehensive no-wake zone for the stretch of the upper Yahara River known as Cherokee Lake, to reduce damage to present and future vegetation restoration efforts, from speeding boats and wave action;
- o Restore the Lake Mendota subwatershed's wetlands and marsh insofar as possible to the extents and ecological conditions at time of original survey, for habitat, open space, visual beauty (incl. viewsheds), cultural enrichment, flood storage, urban stress relief, and outdoor recreation;
- o Lower Lake Mendota's operating range 6" by 2011; thereafter, lower range in regular annual increments (e.g., 1-3");
- o Concurrently, work with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission (CARPC) to create a regional land use plan that ends urban sprawl, so that developers or municipalities do not take the opportunity to use the increased storage capacity of a lowered Lake Mendota to handle more runoff; and,
- o If the lowering of Lake Mendota to its natural level can be accomplished, decommission the Tenney Park locks in some future decade, providing a more frugal system for any interlake transportation by surface water users.

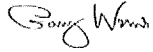
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Please note that, in 2010, CRANES made the same requests to the *Yahara Lakes Legacy Partnership*, and to Dane County's *Lakes & Watershed Commission* and the *Environmental, Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee*.

Additionally, as soon as possible after YLLAG2 convenes, we hope that it will be possible to provide answers for the questions below.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Cordially,



Gary Werner

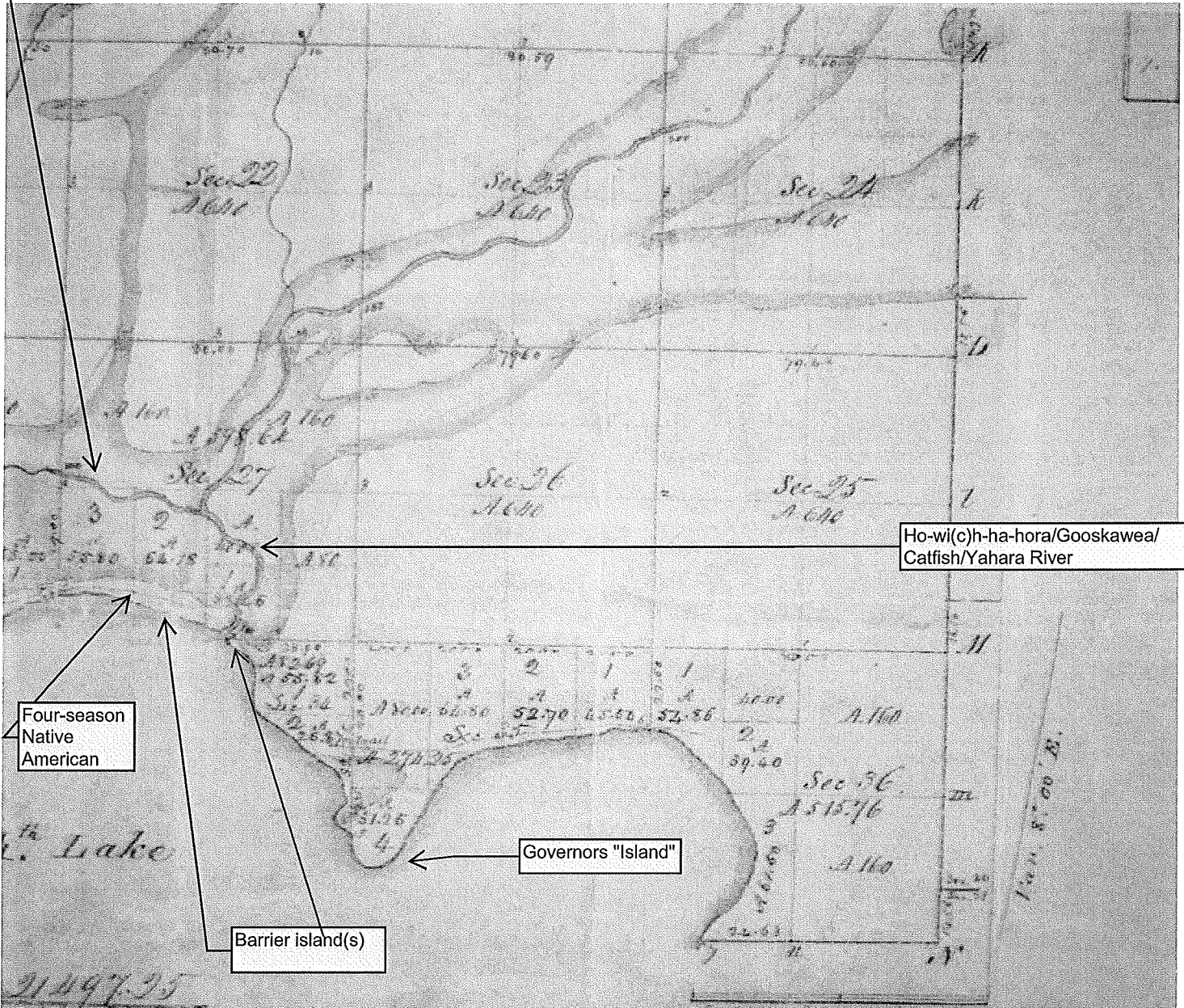
Cc: S Josheff, WDNR Basin Staff  
Chairperson, CARPC c/o K Mesbah, staff

### SOME QUESTIONS RELATED TO LAKE LEVELS

- 1) When will the Montgomery engineering study of Tenney Park Dam/locks that was to be completed last spring be released? Will elected leaders be allowed by Homeland Security to review the un-redacted report?
- 2) When will the USGS study of flooding that would accompany over-topping of the Tenney Park Dam, completed last spring, be released to the public?
- 3) The new Dane County guide to lake level management was meant to inform the public about current operational practices. Why is it now being referred to by certain staff as a guide for decisions about future lake level policy decisions?
- 4) The current lake orders, which maintain a lake level range 4 to 9 feet above pre-Original Survey conditions, are based in part on the purported need for protection of habitat, with amphibians and northern pike mentioned specifically. Yet a square mile of wetlands and shoreline vegetation has been lost since the first dam at what is now Tenney Park was built. How has this loss of habitat and high lake levels affected these and other species? which species, including shellfish in the Yahara River above Hwy 113, and resident/migrant birds, have been lost, or had their populations reduced, due to this loss of habitat and change in physical conditions, including siltation? Have the current lake level orders protected more species than they have harmed?
- 5) What is the minimum "head" needed for Lake Monona to maintain downstream lake or river management that is environmentally sustainable? what is the consequent minimum "head" needed for Lake Mendota (at the Tenney Park Dam)?
- 5) How much does it cost annually to run the Tenney Locks? "per user"? What is the annual user profile? one-way/round-trip? paddle/motorized? small vs. large motorized craft? MSCR pontoon? commercial outing/tour/charter?
- 6) What are the alternatives for providing interlake transit for all current users? for smaller self-powered craft only? What advantages might these "no-lock" approaches have for control of invasive species? for taxpayers?
- 7) Will the issues in Questions 1-6 (above) be explored by YLLAG2 in conjunction with the UW's 2011-12 NSF-funded study of social response to climate change mitigation scenarios for the Yahara watershed?

Cherokee Area  
(from Original Survey, 1833-35)

Six Mile Creek



Ho-wi(c)h-ha-hora/Gooskaweal/  
Catfish/Yahara River

Four-season  
Native  
American

Governors "Island"

Barrier island(s)

31,497.25  
...  
... 1833  
... 1835

The above Map of Township N. 8 Range N. 9 East 4<sup>th</sup> ...  
North West Quarter is strictly conformable to the field notes &  
survey thereof filed in this office which have been made



