

Lake Hopatcong Water Level Management NJDEP Proposal

The last two years Lake Hopatcong has failed to reach full pool following its annual drawdown due to unusual weather patterns, primarily lack of precipitation. In 2015, full pool was missed by four inches and this year by three. The lack of refill renewed discussions throughout the lake community in regards to the extent of the annual drawdown and outflow. After evaluating various options, and looking at past practices with respect to drawdown modification, the NJDEP believes there is a path forward to save water in the lake without causing harm or violating surface water quality standards to the Musconetcong River and without further jeopardizing docks, bulkheads and shoreline.

The NJDEP is proposing the following:

1. Reduce the annual winter drawdown for lake front property owner ice protection from 26” to 22”. As the lake is refilled by direct precipitation, reducing the extent of the annual drawdown is the most effective way of improving lake refill.
 - The last time annual drawdown was altered was in 1990 from 30” to 26” due to a four inch deficit in refill.

2. Replace current outflow reduction threshold “90-day spring precipitation below 7 inches” with “from ice out until April 30, provided stream flows are at or above median levels.” Provided there are minimal impacts to downstream resources.
 - When 90-day precipitation is below 7 inches streams flows are low and often no adjustment can be made without jeopardizing downstream resources.
 - The current plan does not allow a reduction to the outflow when stream flows are good or even high.
 - 90-day precipitation totals shift considerable from one day to the next.

Depending on weather conditions, the NJDEP believes the lake would benefit between 4 to 6 inches in lake level each spring with the proposed changes.

The NJDEP is seeking the support of the Lake Hopatcong community to move forward with a PILOT of this proposal for the drawdown this fall and subsequent spring refill. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these actions would then take place and if property protection is maintained and the river does not suffer, the plan can be formally amended through the LHC and CAC.

The proposal was presented at the July meeting of the Lake Hopatcong Commission. Certified letters to the 1,800 lake front property owners notifying them of the proposal will be sent including an invitation to a public hearing, to be held Monday, September 19 in Jefferson. A meeting of the Citizen Advisory Group will be scheduled in August. Opportunities for written comment will also be provided.