



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails
Box 39, 500 Lafayette Rd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-4039

10 December 2020
Don Kilander, BSLA President
Big Sand Lake Association
Hubbard County, MN

Don,

I want to begin by thanking you for your efforts and the efforts of the Big Sand Lake Association Board to facilitate our broader understanding of the perspectives of Big Sand Lake residents and property owners regarding the timing of the improvement and rehabilitation of the existing Big Sand Lake / Grouse Road Public Water Access. It is my hope that you are willing to continue those efforts by also providing the information presented here to the Association Membership.

As a result of your request, we have received a significant number of responses from permanent and seasonal residents, as well as lake focused commercial businesses. While the responses provided a range of recommendations, including the request to consider an alternative facility design, specific to the question of a potential construction schedule, the majority requested a construction schedule that would provide for limited construction in late 2021 and early 2022. As we have stated previously, our intent has been to provide for the completion of the facility improvements with the least overall disruption to all users, but that we were also open to the consideration of alternative schedules to those we had identified.

As Dave Schotzko outlined for you, we understand that given this is the only Public Water Access to Big Sand Lake, its closure for any period of time can have substantial impacts on residents, non-residents and commercial access/use. In circumstances like this, where there is a single public facility providing recreational boating access to an individual lake, the Division of Parks and Trails consistently places our emphasis on: (1) limiting the construction and closure to the shortest period; and (2) assuring that the facility is open at the conclusion of the boating season for private seasonal equipment removals. It was under this approach that we originally suggested a preferred construction period during July and August 2021. This approach would allow for the shortest construction period, but would require that the entire facility be under construction and closed for the entire period. An additional option was also identified, that would have placed construction immediately after the Labor Day holiday weekend. This option however possesses significant challenges to completion in the 2021 and late season equipment removals given seasonal weather conditions.

As noted above, in response to your request to your membership, we received a number of comments that included both recommendations on the proposed construction schedule as well as a potential design alternative. The design alternative, identified as "Plan A" was correctly or incorrectly, directly attributed by several responders to you. Your efforts to provide for the consideration of additional alternatives is certainly appreciated. Unfortunately, Option A, as described, does not address the principal proposed safety improvements, nor does it provide for the required compliance with the requirements of the American with

Disabilities Act (ADA) for a facility of this type. As described, Option A, does nothing to address the primary focus of the proposed facility improvements, the complete elimination of the current requirement that Grouse Road function in-part as an internal component of the Public Water Access. The current DNR design proposal, will allow for the launching and retrieval of recreational watercraft to be confined to within the boundaries of the dedicated Public Water Access, isolated from Grouse Road. As presented and intended, Option A, would provide for dedicated accessible parking located close the launch area. Compliance with the requirements of the ADA for Water Access facilities, however, also requires that the primary components of the facility including the launch preparation, launch retrieval/tie down and AIS areas, as well as restrooms also meet all accessibility requirements. Unfortunately the existing launch area is not compliant with the ADA, containing surface grades that exceed guidance and can only be addressed through complete reconstruction. To assure that the improvement and rehabilitation of this facility addresses all defined needs and requirements, the DNR will be proceeding with the improvement and rehabilitation of the existing facility under the existing plans and specifications.

Based upon the comments received and the general request that a split construction period be considered, we have developed a revised construction schedule that addresses the principal expressed concern that the ramp remain open throughout the summer and during the late fall. Unfortunately, the need for significant concrete surfacing, including the launch approach, ADA parking area and Tie down/AIS Inspection area, the launch ramp must be closed for a three week period. As we are proposing, construction will be completed in four distinct phases between May 2021 and June 2022.

Phase 1: The first phase will include removal of all trees larger than 3 inches in diameter and will be completed prior to June 1st 2021. Only limited, short term, daily closures of the launch and parking areas are anticipated during the course of the 2-3 days required for these activities.

Phase 2: The second phase will include construction associated with the parking area and much of the proposed new launch area. During this phase the existing launch ramp will be open and unaffected. As proposed, the project contractor will be allowed to begin construction of this phase in late July 2021. All on-site parking will be closed to public use at the start of construction and will remain closed until the week of the 4 October 2021.

Phase 3: The third phase will include the reconstruction of the launch ramp and the construction of the ADA parking area. The contractor will be permitted to begin work on this phase and close the ramp to all use on 13 September and it will remain closed until the week of 4 October 2021. The schedule in this area must accommodate a 10 day “cure” of the significant areas of concrete surfacing. It is intended that the Phase 2 construction will include all work required, except the installation of the final bituminous surfacing. During the week of 4 October 2021, all areas of the facility will be reopened to public use.

Phase 4: The fourth and final phase of the project, consisting of the installation of the final bituminous surface, will require that the entire facility close for 7 – 10 days beginning on 6 June 2022 and reopening the following week. Although limited work may continue during the month of June 2022, there should no additional construction related disruption to public use after 17 June 2022.

While we understand that there may never be a good time to provide improvements to a significant facility like the Big Sand Lake / Grouse Road Public Water Access, we do believe that the revised construction schedule reflects an understanding of the lake community’s request. We will be implementing this schedule in formal construction documents that are anticipated to be complete and issued for competitive bidding in late January / early February 2021. If we can provide any further clarification regarding the proposed schedule as outlined or the project design, do not hesitate to contact either Dave Schotzko 218-766-7529 or myself at your convenience.

Finally, in recognition of the concerns expressed by lake residents regarding the disruptions that would result from any potential closure of the Grouse Road / Public Water Access to Big Sand Lake, given that it represents the lake's single public water access facility, we would welcome an opportunity to work cooperatively with the Big Sand Lake Association in an effort to identify and develop an additional public access opportunity.

Thank you again

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Cc: Senator Paul Utke
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