

Officials pour cold water on lake level resolution

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ALANSON — Emmet County commissioners no longer support a resolution which encouraged a change in Crooked Lake water levels.

In a 4-2 vote Monday, the board members voted to rescind a decision from December which would have meant sending a statement to the Army Corps of Engineers asking for about a 1-and-a-half inch decrease in the lake depth. That change would have been accomplished through the Crooked River Lock, which the Army Corps owns. That suggestion proved unpopular among a large swath of area residents, though, who were concerned about the potential negative consequences such a change

would have on their properties. Dozens spoke up at the commissioners' last January meeting, and more offered comments at this week's meeting.

Commissioners ultimately decided there would have to be more study and analysis before it became appropriate for them to approach the Corps with any particular stance.

"We know the water levels on the lock and weir are regulated in accordance with the agreement with the Army Corps, but we don't know — or at least I don't — what the appropriate process is to change the levels," said Commissioner Charlie MacInnis, who had voted against the resolution in December. "But it seems logical to assume

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that any proposed changes would necessitate a full analysis by the court.”

The resolution did not have any power allowing the county to take action on its own. Other stakeholders, like Springvale Township, Littlefield Township and the Crooked-Pickerel Lake Association, were slated to have their boards consider similar resolutions, although Emmet County’s resolution was not contingent on their support. Still, none of them would have had the power to enact change. That authority belongs to the Army Corps and — depending on how significant the change — possibly Congress.

“As I understood the resolution, it was just to move this issue forward, to interact with the various entities,” said Com-

missioner Neil Ahrens, who opposed the the motion to rescind. “Nothing was going to happen without the Corps saying so. The Corps sets the level. I just look at this is being in the Corps hands, and this was a recommendation.”

Besides Ahrens, Commissioner David White was the other board member who voted no Monday.

The board had a few seats change between December and this year, including the seat of former Commissioner Bill Shorter, who was largely responsible for bringing the resolution forward at that time. At that time, he said he was representing the interests of the “600 residents” who live on the lake, but was barred from voting on the resolution at that meeting because he owned property on the lake, creating a conflict of interest. Current Commissioner Mike Wargel, who replaced Shorter this year, was

required to abstain Monday for the same reason.

Speaking as a private citizen at Monday’s meeting, Shorter said he couldn’t attend the previous meeting, but would have been able to correct the record on several fronts if he had.

The News-Review has reached out to Shorter for

further comment. Some incorrect statements did come up in those January public comments, including the untrue assertion that the resolution called to reduce levels by a foot.

“Flooding problems do exist and are creating property damage and damage to the environ-

ment,” Shorter said, citing a 2012 Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council study which illustrated erosion and other potential issues from the water levels.

A representative from Tip of the Mitt also spoke at the meeting, calling for more caution and data.

“We wanted to make sure there are no unin-

tended, adverse consequences of changing of the water levels,” said Grenetta Thomassey, watershed policy director for the organization. “So we think a full analysis would be required to consider the impacts of changing the water levels of all the interests along the Inland Waterway.”