

# An artic-scape groundbreak

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## Modification for Pelican Lake-River system launched at Fish Lake dam site



It was a frigid day for a ceremonial groundbreaking at the Fish Lake Dam site on the Pelican Lake Chain. Work began on the dam modification project Feb. 7.

Pictured are Jay Elshaug, Pelican Group of Lakes Improvement District; Bert McDonough, PGOLID; Dave Haarstad, PGOLID; Moriya Rufer, RMB Lab; Luther Aadland, DNR; Jim Wolters, DNR; Ben Shane, property manager; Mike Buerkley, Houston Engineering; Mike Pepin, property manager and Erik Jones, Houston Engineering.

In late 2016, the Pelican Group of Lakes Improvement District was awarded a Conservation Partners Legacy Grant from the DNR for funding to complete a modification of the Fish Lake Dam into a Rock Arch Rapids Fishway.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service also contributed funding from their Fish Passage program. PGOLID is working with Houston Engineering for survey, design and oversight of the project.

In late 2017, Hough, Inc. out of Detroit Lakes was awarded the contract for construction, which will take place this February and March.

The project should be substantially completed by the end of March 2018.

Time-lapse photography will track the project's progress and be available when it's completed.

Through the construction, the current dam will not be removed but will be modified.

### **Fishway is “adjustable” to maintain Pelican Lake levels**

This new fishway will be built to hold water levels exactly as the current dam does, so that homeowners don't notice a difference. To ensure the new fishway functions the same as the current dam, water level monitoring in the stream and lake has already been occurring to establish baseline conditions and will also occur after the project. The rocks can be adjusted in the summer if needed for precise elevation targets.

The Fish Lake Dam, located near Dunvilla on the Pelican River, was built in 1932 for the purpose of maintaining consistent water levels in Pelican Lake.

This dam has a long and storied history, including numerous partial washouts and patches, which caused drops in lake water levels of Pelican Lake and have left the dam in deteriorating shape.

An additional problem created by this dam, and many dams in general, is that they are barriers that make dispersal for river species difficult both up and downstream, but these structures can be converted in such a way that they are more favorable to passage of fish, muskrats, otters, shorebirds, waterfowl, salamanders, frogs, crayfish and other invertebrate species. As part of the Red River of the North Fisheries Management Plan, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has listed goals of removing barriers to restore uninterrupted fish migration pathways.

### **Fish is third of nine Pelican River dams to be modified**

On the Pelican River there are nine dams and the Fish Lake Dam is the third one to be modified as rapids. The Pelican Group of Lakes Improvement District (PGOLID), a taxing entity of lake property owners on Pelican, Little Pelican, Bass and Fish Lakes, has been working with the DNR on ideas for a more permanent fix to the dam to improve its structure, safety, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

## **Dunton Locks near DL; Barnesville dams modified**

A similar structure already exists at Dunton Locks County Park near Detroit Lakes and another was just completed this past summer in Barnesville on Whisky Creek at the Blue Eagle Lake Park.

This design will provide a long-term fix to the 84-year-old dam, which will (a) improve the functionality of the dam, (b) provide easier dispersal for river species up and downstream, and (c) provide spawning substrate for lake sturgeon.

PGOLID acknowledges all the project partners including the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Houston Engineering, Hough Inc., Community Advisory Board and adjacent property owners for their support in the grant application and now the implementation of the project.

PGOLID is involved in many improvement projects around Pelican, Little Pelican, Bass, and Fish Lakes including water quality monitoring, shoreline restoration, tree planting, Aquatic Invasive Species management, and education.

### **Project impacts nearly 15,000 water acres; 84 river miles**

Even though this project covers less than one acre of land, it will benefit the 14,790 acres of lakes and 84 river miles in the entire Pelican River Watershed by restoring connections.