

Highlands Lakes & Trails Committee Report

April 18, 2024, Board Meeting

The Lakes & Trails Committee, with support and guidance from Jim Hale, has been actively gathering documents and information, and coordinating with Sam King, to help advance several projects.

Highlands Lake Boat Access Renovation

At the January Board Meeting, the Committee presented their boat slide option for the renovation of the existing access site off Highland Glen Drive; the Board agreed with this concept and requested Sam King move this project forward. The Committee was able to contact the Capital Programs staff at the VA Department of Wildlife Resources and obtain detailed engineer drawings and AutoCad files for a boat slide and two suggested contractors that they recommended for this kind of project in Chesterfield County. This information was forwarded to Sam for his use. Committee members also met on-site two times with Sam, Jim Hale, and two potential contractors to discuss what we had in mind as far as a boat slide construction project, so that they could come back with their draft scope of work and cost estimate documents. Sam has received proposal (scope/cost) responses from both contractors, and more information (including revised proposals) was requested and received from each contractor, and the Committee and Sam reviewed and evaluated all documents to make a recommendation to the Board.

The Committee does recommend the Board have Sam King proceed with contracting construction of the boat slide with Harbor Dredge and Dock at a cost of \$52,850, according to their 4/2/24 revised proposal. We know the cost is more than any of us expected but there are several factors and considerations that lead us to this recommendation:

- 1) Material and labor costs have gone up significantly over the last few years, particularly labor costs.
- 2) The first proposal from Harbor Dredge was just over \$56,240 but after discussions with the Committee and the expressed need to lower cost, if possible, Harbor Dredge did come back with a revised proposal with a cost of \$52,850.
- 3) This revised proposal will still result in construction of a quality, low maintenance boat slide that should meet the Community's small boat access needs for decades to come.
- 4) The Committee feels that we cannot further reduce the scope or materials, to get an even lower cost, without completely abandoning the boat slide option and starting back at square one to try and come up with a different approach (at this point we do not have anything in mind, so it would really be starting over).

The Committee did ask Harbor Dredge when they could possibly start on this project if contracted toward the end of April and they said it will take as much as 60 days to get the required permits, so they would be looking at a mid-summer start date (this delay would be true for all potential contractors).

Again, the Committee recommends the Board have ACS West contract with Harbor Dredge & Dock to construct a boat slide at the existing Highland Lake boat access site, according to Harbor Dredge's 4/2/24 revised proposal with a cost of \$52,850.

Highland Lake Dam Safety Certification

The Committee has worked to support ACS West as they continue to address required action items found in the 2-year Dam Safety Conditional Certificate, with the goal of obtaining, a Regular (unconditional) Dam Safety Operation & Maintenance Certificate, according to the provisions of the Dam Safety Act administered under the Dam Safety Program of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The Committee coordinated with DCR's Regional Dam Safety Engineer to obtain the most recent list of conditions and action items in the Highland Dam Conditional Certificate, which was shared with ACS West to help them navigate contracts and processes to get required action items (inspections, studies, reports, development of an Emergency Action Plan, needed repairs and renovations) completed by stated deadlines. The Committee has participated in two on-site meetings with Sam King and potential contractors for the required dam spillway repairs. The Committee will continue to help ACS West any way we can as they take steps and achieve accomplishments that lead toward full dam certification.

Community Lakes Management, Protection, and Responsive Use Guidance Document

The Committee has put together a guidance document that has important information, covenants, and state and county laws and regulations pertaining to the dos and don'ts of shoreline and water habitat management, fish and wildlife management, fishing, and boating, to help all lakefront landowners and all members using our Lakes meet our obligation to become good stewards of these important natural resources. Our Highland Community Lakes offer members a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities, including fishing, boating, wildlife viewing, and just plain relaxing and enjoying the outdoors. Our lakes, their shorelines, and surrounding terrestrial habitat are home to dozens of species of plants, fish, wildlife, and aquatic life that depend on clean water and adequate habitat to live and thrive. Because of the recreational opportunities and critical fish and wildlife habitat found in our Highlands Community, it is essential that all of us do what we can to manage and protect these valuable water, plant, and wildlife resources. For those of us that are lucky enough to live on the Lakes and those that want to enjoy recreating on the Lakes, it is essential that you read through this guidance document. The document is attached to this report for the Board's review and approval for making this available on the website for all Community members. Hopefully this will be found on the Highlands website under Asset Committees – Lakes & Trails Committee – Reports and the Committee will be glad to work with the web master to try and make this available in several locations on the website.

Lake Margaret Easement/Access Road to the Dam Area

Currently there is a gravel road that leads from the cul-de-sac on Lake Margaret Terrace down toward Lake Margaret and the Dam. There is also an easement through private property for access to the Lake and Dam in this same area, but it was unclear whether the road was within the easement and the exact boundaries of the easement. Sam King was requested to contract a boundary survey to answer those questions, and he invited the Lakes and Trails Committee to meet on-site to observe the survey conducted 2/6/24. Sam subsequently found that the easement was deeded to the Highlands Community Association in 2017.

The survey revealed that most of the existing gravel road leading from Lake Margaret Terrace toward Lake Margaret and the Dam is within the Association's easement boundaries, but there is one section (1st curve to the left) that is outside the easement. At some point the Association will need to "fix" the gravel access road so that it is entirely within the easement boundary. Also, the easement does lead down toward the lake, but the easement does not include a) the shoreline

area where people are able to launch small boats (old concrete ramp and breaks in brush along the shoreline) and b) the Lake Margaret Dam; that whole shoreline area and Dam are owned by Lake Margaret LLC. So, the Association easement provides a way to get close to the lake, but the area that is close to the Lake and Dam is still private property.

Another consideration involves access to the Dam through our easement. In the very near future, Lake Margaret LLC will need access to the Dam to bring the Dam into compliance with state Dam Safety laws and regulations. The Committee contacted Brenton Payne (Regional Dam Safety Engineer for a large area of the state that includes Chesterfield County) and Lake Margaret LLC was recently issued a 2-year Conditional Certificate (1/31/24 to 1/31/26); during that 2-year period the owner, contracted engineering firm, and DCR will be taking necessary steps to conduct annual and owner inspections, develop an Emergency Action Plan (EAP), and make repairs and renovations as deemed necessary to bring the Dam into compliance with the provisions of the Dam Safety Act administered under the Dam Safety Program of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Because the lake shoreline and Dam area are privately owned and the owner is currently working through the State Dam Safety certification process, the Lakes and Trails Committee recommends that the Board table any further actions or activity with our easement, until the owner of the Dam has completed all work requirements and received a Regular (“clean”) Dam Safety Operation and Maintenance Certificate from DCR.

Bridge over Second Branch Connecting Woodpecker Trails

Several sources have stated that Chesterfield County was going to build a pedestrian bridge over Second Branch connecting the two trails that run along Woodpecker Dr. in front of the Lake Margaret Development (one trail runs along Woodpecker from Cattail Dr. northwest, across Lake Margaret Dr., and ends near Second Branch; there is a sister trail that runs southeast along Woodpecker from Killycrom Dr. down to Second Branch). The Lakes and Trails Committee wanted to find out more details so they could answer questions from members of the Association. The Committee contacted County Planning first, was sent to County Transportation, and ended up at County Parks and Recreation. Parks does have the lead on this project, and we finally received a response from Stuart Connock, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation. The good news: Parks did fund an engineering study of options for the bridge and construction approach, and “finalized bridge type, scope, and budget for the project”. The bad news: This project is much more expensive than the County originally thought, the County does not currently have enough funds for construction, “trail work outside of the park system, as this project, is a second-tier priority”, and the County “will be placing this project in their FY30 (Funding July 2029) Trail Improvements Plan”. Since construction could take 2-3 years, completion could be 7-8 years out.