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### Pulling the Plug on Fawtuckaway Lake

"It's unbelievable, it looks like Mars," is resident John Decker's description for the remains of Pawtuckaway lake. What was just this fall an eight hundred acre waterway has now been reduced to a streambed. Carved in the once-hidden bottom are deep valleys. Rock mountains jut upwards, no longer obscured by the water's surface. Islands meet the mainland. Fresh water clams are strewn about, left helpless when the water receded, dry and crusty in their shells.

Just after Labor Day, Pawtuckaway lake in Nottingham N.H. began being drawdown by the Water Resources Department. The problem lies in the main dam. It was built in 1958 and now the assembly at the twenty-five foot mark has worn out. Don Rapoza of Water Resources explains the extended drawdown this way. "The outlet structure at the bottom of the dam needs replacement. The only feasible way is to drain the lake."

Feasible yes, but what effects are modern science and feasibility going to have on the wildlife in and around Pawtuckaway's dry shores? This is the major concern of residents.

"I fish the lake heavy," said one angler. "I can't see any fish in the pools. I suspect most of the fish went down the river when the dam opened." Along with the fish; frogs and insects have disappeared. Residents are upset, and with good reason. Wildlife is just returning after the destruction of its habitat by gypsy moths. "It's taken years for animals to return, and now this happens." Joan Lukens, long time resident, points out, "we've just gotten back to having wildlife, we spotted three heron and one loon. When the small fish go, what happens to all these birds?"

Residents hope the drawdown won't force larger animals away. "It upsets a whole ecological system." Small animals and predators will seek a new environment, and so will the big animals. It's happened before. "In the

sixties then used to be a cranberry bog where the state park is." There were many deer, moose, and otter. But the building of the campground forced most large wildlife out of the area. Residents don't want to lose what's left.

Home owners understand the drawdown. Al Lukens admits, "It's something you have to accept. If you have to repair a dam, you have to repair a dam. it has to be done." But they would have liked a chance to learn about possible wildlife damage before the project was started. Some lake residents originally planned to fight the drawdown, but word filtered through that it was either fix the dam, or lose the lake completely. If it wasn't done, the state could pass the cost on to the residents. "No one ever pursued the nature thing because it was shut up or pay for it yourself." Most residents can't afford to pay for a dam repair, so they were at the mercy of the state's decisions.

Now that the lake is empty the residents are still concerned by the damage, yet fascinated with their dry frontyards. They talk of crevices and ledges that make up the bottom, "it's not just flat under there." They measure depths, and remember rocky coves. They photograph the giant crater and enjoy exploring the new landscape.

"I was amazed just walking along the lake's floor. Remembering back to the summer when I boated twenty feet above where I was standing. I was always trying to peer through the dark water and catch a glimpse of what was down there. Now it was all around me. It's an eerie feeling." In one channel there's an old dirt road, complete with bridge. It once divided the lake. For over twenty years it's been sitting dormant, beneath ten feet of water, but now it's plainly visible. And if you've ever lost a Band-Aid while swimming you're not alone. There are hundreds of them lining the state park beach just past the seven foot mark.

Concern for wildlife, and fascination are not the only emotions residents feel. There is anger in their voices, anger with the state's

handling of the affair. About a year ago there was a notice in the local paper. There was also a notice at the town hall. This was the first warning residents had. "I can't understand why they didn't send out a letter, telling why and how they were going to do it.", said one home owner. "The summer people had to find out from the year-rounders."

Don Rapoza explained, "The drawdown notice is published in the local paper, usually the Union Leader. There is no mailing to landowners." Normal procedures also include sending a detailed plan to the lake association. They try to "cooperate with the lake association."

At Pawtuckaway, a meeting was scheduled in early summer to discuss the drawdown with someone from the Water Resources Department. But the "representative never showed up." One woman voiced her opinion-"The state has, I think, been very lax."

The drawdown began just after Labor Day as expected. The lake is lowered a few feet every year for "two major factors", explained Don Rapoza. The first reason is that shifting ice can damage walls and property. It's lowered to protect landowners. The other reason is to control spring flooding. If there is a heavy winter the dam won't be able to hold back all the water from the melting snow. So a minor drawdown is nothing new to residents. "But this year the drawdown came faster and sooner than before," said John Decker. "We knew they'd pull the plug, but we thought we'd have until the weekend to get the boats out, by Tuesday it was down." His wife Karen added "We had to run around with lanterns and lights getting the boats out."

People wanting to camp at the state park were also upset. The season runs until mid October and every weekend campers would arrive, unaware there was no lake. Camping rates weren't reduced, and there was no swimming or

boating. One angry youngster told his father, "we shoul-da gone to Win-p-saukee."

Work on the dam is scheduled for completion by January first. But Don Rapoza thinks it will take longer due to other projects in the state. He hopes that when completed the repair will last for fifty years; residents hope longer.

For now, concerned naturalists, fishermen, and residents, must sit back and wait until Spring, or longer, to assess damages. As far as the fish are concerned John Decker feels "the state can restock, but will the wildlife return?" Joan Lukens has noticed "the beaver are gone", and she is worried. "I've seen one out of three heron but no loon."

Will the birds and animals return? How much damage was done? Or simply, what is going to happen. No one seems to know.

It's been a trying time for residents, but they still keep a pleasant outlook. The fishing poles are waiting in the closet, hoping things return to normal. There are no for sale signs at the lake.

People disagree about parts of the drawdown: where the fish went, what day it dropped, or even how long it will take to refill the lake. But everyone who counts on Pawtuckaway for fun agrees with Karen Decker-"It sure ended the summer quickly."