

The following article written by Jared Stonesifer, Eagle Staff Writer, was on the front page of the Butler Eagle on Friday, July 29, 2011.

Drained Dreams Crowd shares lake complaints

Jared Stonesifer, Staff Writer

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Middlesex Twp -- About 200 people packed the township's municipal center Thursday night to question state officials about their decision to drain and close Glade Run Lake.

Many of those people let their frustrations be known early and often, sometimes jeering or even talking over officials during their presentation. About half the crowd stood during the meeting as others crammed in a hallway trying to catch a glimpse of the proceedings.

A handful of state, county and local officials also packed the crowded room and took questions from the public. Those included state Sen. Jane Orié, R-40th, and state Rep. Daryl Metcalfe, R-12th, as well as representatives from Gov. Tom Corbett and U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire, D-4th.

The audience members' questions were many, but a majority focused on why state officials would choose to drain a lake that attracts 16,000 visitors a year and draws in about \$1.2 million annually for the local economy.

Those officials said the process behind draining the lake was set in motion when inspectors with the state's Fish and Boat Commission found a large crack in the lake's dam during a routine inspection in May.

Fearing the public safety of residents who live downstream, officials with the state's Department of Environmental Protection classified the dam as a "high hazard."

Despite officials' assertions that the move was made in the interest of public safety, one vocal resident repeatedly referred to the situation as "overkill."

"Would you be as angry if the dam failed and killed five people downstream?" asked Tim Wilson, Fish and Boat Commission spokesman. "We had no choice."

As questions mounted surrounding how long Glade Run will remain a dry lake bed, Gary Moore, another commission spokesman, admitted he couldn't offer any reliable timeline on if or when the water will return.

The reason for the uncertainty is simple, Moore said: the Fish and Boat Commission has no money to fix the dam, a project that is estimated to cost more than \$4 million.

He explained to the crowd that his agency is almost entirely self-sustaining and that it receives little funding through the state or federal government.

Since that's the case, Moore said, the commission relies on fishing licenses as its primary source of income, which is a problem because the number of licenses bought each year has declined steadily in the last decade.

With almost 20 other lakes around the state in the same situation as Glade Run, Moore admitted the commission simply doesn't have enough money to fix them.

"We have a monumental task," he said of finding funds.

That's why Moore, Metcalfe and Orie repeatedly urged the audience to spearhead the fundraising efforts themselves.

Even the smallest amount of funds could supplement potential grants that could be awarded by the state, Metcalfe said. He added that residents can count on him and Orie to be advocates for their cause in Harrisburg.

Orie said, "We'll be with you every step of the way."

Another option, according to Moore, is that the Fish and Boat Commission could lease land to an energy company to drill for Marcellus Shale natural gas, although the commission hasn't been contacted by any company.

Moore also dispelled reports that the lake was drained solely for the purpose of gas drilling. He called those comments unsubstantiated because an energy company could easily drill for gas horizontally without draining any water.

Some audience members remained unsatisfied by officials' explanations and emotionally described the loss they feel when looking at the dry lake bed.

Anna Grebner spoke with tears in her eyes about the lake.

She said she lives behind Glade Run, a spot where she met her husband of nearly 30 years.

Grebner, who said she recently was diagnosed with cancer, said she has such a special fondness for the area that she wanted to have her ashes spread there upon her death.

"I cry over this," she said. "We just want our lake back."