

Lake Levels in the Tippecanoe Watershed – A brief summary

On November 17th, 2009, Kosciusko Lakes and Streams and the Tippecanoe Watershed Foundation (TWF) sponsored a public Forum on Flooding. David Nance (DNR Division of Water) spoke on the above topic. Following this presentation there were numerous breakout sessions allowing the 100 participants to ask questions of agencies and groups including National Weather Service, USGS, several DNR groups, several Kosciusko, Noble and Whitley County departments, and The Nature Conservancy.

Each lake level has its own unique characteristics such as incoming streams, precipitation events, and control structures. The control structures' primary use is to provide a minimum lake level during the summer season. They were not designed as flood control structures.

The Tippecanoe watershed has 3 control structures. The Barbee control structure is fixed and cannot change during the year. The other two control structures are located at the outlets to Webster and Oswego Lakes. These lake level control structures have a summer level and a winter level determined by Kosciusko County Court Order last revised in 1981. The winter level allows the lakes to be lowed primarily to minimize ice damage. The dates of the winter level are November 1 to April 1 of each year. The rest of the year is at the summer level which is intended to maintain the minimum lake level.

Our Tippecanoe watershed has had 4 major rain events in the last two years (2008 and 2009). Three of these events created lake levels that had a 10% chance of occurring during that year (e.g. Barbee chain level at 840' above sea level) and one had a 1% chance of occurring (e.g. Barbee chain level at 840.7). This set of events has lots of folks wondering if something has changed over the last several years since we haven't experienced flooding since the early 1980's when we had 3 events with a 10% chance between 1980 and 1985.

Nothing has changed from a lake level control structure standpoint. We have just had a number of significant rain events in the last two years that exceeded recent memory of how it used to be.