



OSSIPEE LAKE REPORT

Volume 5, Issue 1 • January – March 2006

KEY DATES:

- Saturday, February 18: Annual GMCG Winter Mammal Tracking Workshop. Calumet Center, Freedom. Info @ 603-539-1859.
- Tuesday, March 14: Freedom Town Meeting. Town Hall, 9 AM.
- Tuesday, March 14: Ossipee elections. Town Hall, 10AM-7PM.
- Wednesday, March 15: Ossipee Town Meeting. Town Hall, 6:30 PM.

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WIND, RAIN, FLOODING AND EARLY ICE



Rising water surrounds homes on Long Sands Road in Ossipee. The early drawdown of Ossipee Lake after Labor Day prevented major flooding when the state received a record rainfall in October. *Photo: Jean Hansen*

FREEDOM — It began with boaters panicking over an early drawdown and ended with fears that ice could damage the shoreline this spring. In between, flooding rains, gale force winds, and frayed nerves helped make this one of the strangest autumns on the lake in recent memory.

At the center of the story is the drawdown. Each year the water level of the lake is held at 407.25' through the summer and then lowered to its winter level of 403.5' to prevent ice damage. The process begins after Labor Day and proceeds gradually until it is completed around Thanksgiving.

In the fall of 2004 the state announced it would take the lake to its winter level immediately after Labor Day 2005, compressing the drawdown schedule from several

months to several weeks.

Initially the rapid drawdown was thought to be for dam repairs, which prompted the last such event in 1994. Officials later clarified that the reason was to accommodate lake property owners who wanted extra time for shoreline maintenance work.

Drawdown Planning

Decisions on early drawdowns are the joint responsibility of the Dam Bureau of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, and the Ossipee Lake Dam Authority (OLDA), which serves as the state's local partner in dam management. OLDA is funded by Freedom and Ossipee and its selectmen serve on the board.

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GRANDPARENTS LABOR TO STAY ON OSS�PEE LAKE

By Nate Giarnese

Article courtesy of the Conway Daily Sun

OSSIPEE — Jean Hansen runs a web-based stencil design business. George Eisener is a builder. The two hard-driving entrepreneurs live on a desirable road in a part of town that has seen its lakefront land values explode in recent years.

Taxes on their homes have nearly doubled

since 2001. In that time the town's assessments on their 100-by-200-foot lots have increased roughly fivefold. Four years ago, Hansen's lot was worth \$115,000 — her tax card now lists the land at a dizzying \$666,000, plus another \$217,000 for her Cape-style home.

The two are deeply troubled by the waterfront phenomenon, which this year again jacked up half-acre lot values by nearly

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GRANDPARENTS LABOR TO STAY ON OSSIPEE LAKE

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double in their Ossipee Lake neighborhood, from \$380,000 in 2004. They say their incomes are still enough to pay their taxes. But Hansen turns 70 in December, and Eisener hits 80 next week.

Both grandparents, they say decades of hard work put them where they are, on Long Sands Road, on the singular shores of Ossipee's largest lake.

No retirement is in sight for these two. Both plan to "work to the end" to keep what they have.

And they say they will need to, in order to pay their taxes. Hansen this year will pay roughly \$11,000 in property taxes; Eisener just under \$10,000.

"I am working to stay in the house," Hansen said. "How many 70-year-old grandmothers do you know that do this kind of thing? I'm not complaining. I'm just lucky to live in this beautiful place."

She runs a cottage stencil design company out of her home, does all of her own shipping and packing, and drives a van to Connecticut each month to teach.

"I am going to work to the end," she said. "It will be a challenge for me. But I'm determined to do it for as long as I can."

Eisener, a general contractor, built his own home on Long Sands Road in 1958, and just recently built his latest in the neighborhood of about 28 houses. The new one will soon go on the market, Hansen said.

"I didn't buy my house to make money," said Eisener, a Massachusetts resident who has brought his family to the lake for decades. "I, like Jeanie, have to keep working if I want to stay here."

Some Forced Out

But some of their retired neighbors are in trouble, and some have already left. The neighborhood will soon have seen a 30 percent turnover in the last six months, Hansen said.

Six out of the seven properties sold or currently on the market were owned by year-round residents forced out by taxes.

"One of them left crying," Eisener said. "She said, 'I expected to spend the rest of my life here.' But she couldn't do it. We had a dinner for her."

Eisener in part blames the town's tax assessments, which selectmen admit again hammered lakefront homeowners. "One third



Jean Hansen says she plans to "work to the end" to be able to stay in her home on Ossipee Lake. Photo: George Eisener

went down, one third went up and one third stayed the same," selectman Joe Skehan said just before tax bills went out in November. "If you lived on the lake you got hammered."

"That's the reason they left," Eisener said.

He and Hansen say Long Sands Road has in the past been singled out for tax increases. This year, they asked the board to revisit the recent assessments on their street, and bring them in line with current sales values.

Four out of the five homes that sold in this latest rash of turnovers went at prices below the assessed values assigned by the town this year.

Neighborhood Revaluation

In 1998, the two say, the town reassessed only their neighborhood, based on two homes that sold over assessed values. The resulting revaluation raised home values on the entire road, and taxes, they said.

Representing about 15 members of the newly re-formed Long Sands Road Association, Hansen and Eisener asked selectmen on Monday to do it again, this time in reverse, to lower their taxes.

"You did it to us in 1998, do it to us again," Eisener said.

Town Hall Friday reported staff is researching whether a Long Sands-only revaluation ever took place. Selectmen could not confirm it happened in that year.

Selectmen's chair Peter Olkkola said the board will sit down with the town's hired assessing firm to review the request. He said the association can expect a response in "a couple of

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The Alliance is a member of the New Hampshire Lakes Association (www.nhlakes.org).

RAPID DRAWDOWN FOLLOWED BY FLOODING AND EARLY ICE

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Steve Doyon of the Dam Bureau says the Labor Day drawdown was approved by the state after being recommended by OLDA, whose members had fielded the requests from lake property owners. By August, however, only five property owners had applied to the state for the permits that are required to perform shoreline work.

Panicked Boaters

After determining that there was a low level of public awareness of the drawdown, the state issued a press release in August stating that the dam gates would be opened the week after Labor Day and the water would drop rapidly.

While the intent was to prompt boaters to make early plans, the prospect of the lake draining at a precipitous rate apparently caused some people to panic.

As Labor Day approached, officials reported receiving phone calls from boaters worried that their boats would be stranded with no way to get them out of the lake.

Commercial ramp owners also called with complaints about lost business and concerns that hundreds of boaters would create chaos by attempting to remove their boats on the same day.

One of those who received calls was State Representative David Babson, who subsequently arranged for the state to lower the water more slowly during the week after Labor Day to give boaters more time to make arrangements.

In announcing the new schedule, Babson also asked why no one had apparently considered the economic impact of the drawdown.

Noting that autumn vacationers and boaters would likely go elsewhere, he told the Conway Daily Sun "We need the money. These guys buy gas, they buy fishing tackle; they use the marinas."

Orderly Withdrawal

Throughout Labor Day weekend and the days that followed, hundreds of boats were removed from the lake in an orderly fashion. By mid-month, docks stood high and dry and the sound of boat engines was replaced by the roar of ATVs racing around the muddy perimeter of the lake in the warm September sun.

On September 26th, Bob Smart, who writes Ossipee Lake Alliance's e-mail "Smart Reports", announced that the drawdown was almost complete. As it turned out, 'almost' was the operative word.



Lakeside Landing Marina at the low point of the early drawdown. Days later these buildings were surrounded by water. *Alliance Photo*

Flooding Rains

After hitting a low of 403.5' on October 8th, the water level rose after two days of steady rain. On the 11th it stood at 409.6' – more than two feet higher than on Labor Day. Then, more rain: buckets of it that released torrents of water that traversed the watershed and entered the lake from a dozen rivers and streams.

More than eleven inches of rain fell in October to set a state record, according to website northconwayweather.com. Had the lake not been at its winter level the flooding could have surpassed the destructive June, 1999 flood, which is considered to be a 50-year flood event. Even so, there were problems.

While the Ossipee Lake area was spared the catastrophic flooding that occurred in the western part of the state, the New Hampshire Union Leader reported that campers had to be rescued from low-lying areas surrounding the Bearcamp River in West Ossipee, where portions of Whit's End Campground were submerged.

At Lakeside Landing Marina, Wayne and Nancy Killam scrambled to move supplies to high ground as seven inches of water invaded their store and spilled over to the adjacent campground. Outside their office the current of the channel to Broad Bay raced by as if in an action movie.

At the southern end of the big lake, the Long Sands residential community was hit hard. Water covered Long Sands Road and surrounded homes as several days of gale force winds pummeled breakwaters and eroded the shoreline.

"We need the money. These guys buy gas, they buy fishing tackle; they use the marinas."

Rep. David Babson

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TAXES FORCING LONG-TIME PROPERTY OWNERS TO MAKE TOUGH CHOICES

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weeks.”

Olkkola said high taxes are increasingly hard on people in all areas of town, and from all walks of life.

“People have come up to me and said, ‘I can’t pay my taxes.’ These are the people we have to worry about,” he said.

“It’s going to get to a point where people are not going to be able to live here. That would be a sad state of affairs,” Olkkola said.

Spending Controls Needed

Outside of a fix by the N.H. Legislature to the state’s property tax system, Olkkola said the first thing Ossipee should do is cut local budgets.

“The only way to control it is to cut back on spending,” he said. “You can always cut somewhere.”

Hansen agreed, saying fixed incomes failed to absorb the latest round of tax hikes, resulting in the home sales.

“These are retirees hoping to spend their last days here. They are all on limited incomes and they just can’t swing it,” Hansen said.

“In spite of what the town thinks, we are not all wealthy people. We are here because we worked 24/7 every day of our lives, some of us for 45 years,” she said.

High Taxes, Little Return

Despite their increasingly high share of the tax burden, the lake’s older residents claim they consume few town services. And those who are part-timers don’t get a vote at town meeting — only full-time residents do.

“We don’t get education services, our kids aren’t in school, we don’t get social services. Here the town is getting all this money for very little in return,” she said. “We get town plowing, and dump stickers that cost \$5.”

Beach Costs At Issue

The Long Sands Road Association, which opposes a town proposal to build a public beach next to their neighborhood, says that project will serve to further hike their taxes.

Hansen said the group’s opposition to a vote of town meeting that pledged \$20,000 toward the beach is not an effort, as some charge, to keep locals out of the lake. The added tax impact, if the project moves forward, would just be too high, she said.

“It’s silly to spend all this money,” Hansen said. “I don’t think all these people on the lake



“We can’t take another hit,” says George Eisener, whose taxes on his lake home have almost doubled since 2001. Photo: Jean Hansen

don’t want them to have access to the lake.”

Some have labeled the battle over the beach one of “haves” against “have-nots.” Supporters have rebuked outspoken lakefront homeowners, some from out of state, for trying to keep Ossipee’s less affluent, landlocked locals, from swimming in the town’s largest lake.

Harry Mellow, the selectman driving the beach effort, said he expect grants to pay for some construction, and that the overall cost of building and maintaining the beach will not overwhelm taxpayers. And he said, the vast majority of voters in town back the proposal, which remains in a study phase.

“We will have to lay it all out for town meeting, all the costs. They will have to approve it,” Mellow said. “I will not be for it if it is wildly expensive.”

He also has said rising property taxes are a problem. As homeowners sell more homes at higher and higher prices, values and taxes go up. The troubling trend, while profitable for some sellers, is driving full-time residents off Ossipee Lake, Mellow said.

“I feel sorry for the older people being forced out, that’s a problem,” he said. “But not for those who come up here from out of state and buy a vacation home.”

He said he sympathizes with Hansen, a full-time resident, and Eisener, a 50-year homeowner.

“The reason taxes have been going up is because of people selling and moving,” he said. If the assessor’s work is accurate, there is not much the board can do, he said. The state’s traditional property tax system is often blamed

“We are not all wealthy people. We are here because we worked 24/7 every day of our lives, some of us for 45 years.”
Jean Hansen

ALLIANCE SAYS BEACH STUDY HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR PROTECTION

By Terry Leavitt

Article courtesy of Carroll County Independent

OSSIPEE — Ossipee Lake Alliance says the initial study of natural resources at Long Sands shows that the proposed site for a new town beach for Ossipee does in fact have rare plants and significant plant communities that need to be protected.

These include several occurrences of one rare plant (grassleaf goldenrod) directly within the area of the proposed beach.

In a letter to area newspapers, signed by the Alliance's Executive Director David Smith, the Alliance has called for elected officials, environmental groups and local residents to work together to seek permanent protection for the Ossipee Lake Natural Area (identified in state documents as Ossipee Lake State Park).

Smith said that the Alliance and other organizations will soon announce how people can help seek permanent state protection for the property.

In an interview yesterday, Smith said he is not prepared to give details of that plan, but said:

"We feel that DRED [the N.H. Department of Resources and Economic Development] is not meeting its responsibility and is headed down the wrong path."

"We believe DRED has a responsibility to come up with a plan to preserve and protect that area."

Forum Needed

The new study only reinforces earlier research that found evidence of rare plants and communities, he said.

The Alliance hopes the state will hold a community forum to get information and opinions from people who live near and use the lake.

He said the town and organizations like Ossipee Lake Alliance, Green Mountain Conservation Group and various associations on the lake could help with preservation efforts, but he added the responsibility for protection lies with the state.

"We're looking for the state to create a policy that protects the natural area."

"It is not appropriate for the state to put the town of Ossipee or any other private entity in the position of managing that protection," he said.

According to a press release from the Alliance, the letter was written in response to the results of the Ossipee-funded scientific study of the 400-acre wetland preserve in which the town

wants the state to approve a new beach.

Smith called the new study exciting and said he hoped the results would be a matter of pride to area residents and an inspiration to teachers and environmental hobbyists, as was envisioned in the property's 1969 deed restrictions requiring use of the land for education.

"Ossipee Lake has more special places than any other lake in the state, and the Natural Area is its crown jewel."

"Once again research has shown it to be a place like nowhere else," he said.

As people learn more about the area, he said, he believes they too will see the importance of its uniqueness and want to preserve it.

Concerns Predate Proposal

The Alliance has opposed placing a public beach at Long Sands since the plan was announced by Ossipee Selectman Harry Merrow in the fall of 2004, because of concerns about protecting rare plants, plant communities, and archeological resources on the land.

Merrow has said the preliminary study conducted this fall is inconclusive as to whether the proposed beach would hurt significant natural resources.

Although some of the plant communities are rare (and one identified as unique) in New Hampshire, he said, they may not be rare outside of the state.

He said more research is needed and plans should go forward with the second half of the study.

But Smith said, "There is nothing inconclusive about the study."

"Harry has said all year long that he felt the existence of rare plants in the area was exaggerated over the years, and he didn't believe there was anything left in there. And the study proves that to be wrong," Smith said.

Better Balance Needed

Both proponents and opponents of the beach project point out that the beach area is already busy with boater visits throughout the summer.

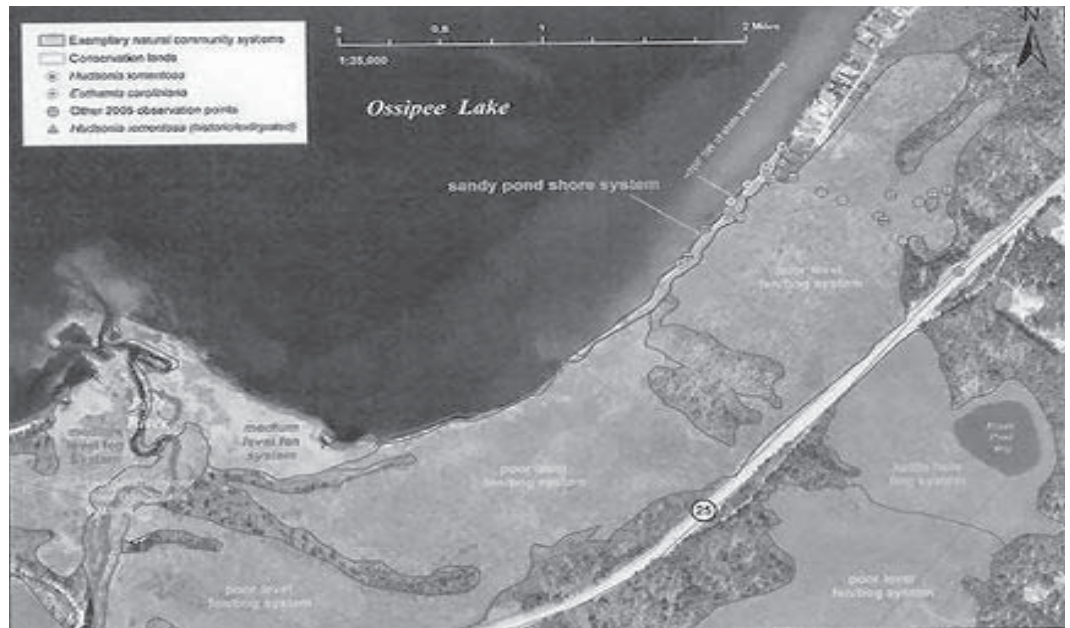
But while proponents say that a beach would not make the situation worse, and might make it better by providing some oversight of beach use, opponents of the project say creating access to the site over land will only exacerbate a bad situation.

"The land was intended to be used for both recreation and education," Smith said. "Our

"Once again research has shown the Natural Area to be a place like nowhere else."

David Smith

RARE NATURAL COMMUNITIES, ENDANGERED PLANTS AT LAKE'S LONG SANDS



Map shows location of endangered plants and rare natural communities in portion of Long Sands Natural Area where Ossipee has proposed building a beach. Map: DRED

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thought was, and continues to be, there is already an abundance of recreation there. There's so much recreation there the area is being destroyed," he said.

Even before the beach project was proposed, Ossipee Lake Alliance was calling for more protection of resources for the Ossipee Lake Natural Area.

Referring to earlier studies of the land, one as recent as 2003, the Alliance noted a loss natural resources, apparently due to the way people were using the area.

Nature Conservancy Study

In the most recent study, conducted this fall by an ecologist from the state's Natural Heritage Bureau, five natural communities were documented in the Ossipee Lake Natural Area.

Natural communities are recurring groupings of plants found in a specific physical environment. Of those communities, four are rare in New Hampshire, and one is not known to exist elsewhere in the state.

Researchers also found multiple instances of the endangered plant species *Euthamia caroliniana* (grassleaf goldenrod) in and around the proposed beach area.

The report covers the first part of a two-part study. Researchers are expected to survey the property again in the spring and publish a final report by July. A study of archeological resources is also required.

Smith said he hopes Ossipee selectmen will see the project through to completion and fund the second half of the study.

"We hope Ossipee's selectmen will proceed because the results will provide important additional documentation of the site's value and unique place in the community," he said.

Ossipee Lake Natural Area, a massive state-owned wetland, was acquired by the state in 1969, and immediately attracted state and academic specialists who documented rare plants and ancient artifacts.

At the same time, the undeveloped shoreline became a magnet to boaters who congregated there to swim.

In 2003, DRED's researchers documented the damage being caused to the Natural Area by recreation. They recommended that a restoration and preservation plan be established for the site which they designated a "hotspot," an environmentally significant state property that is threatened.

The new study is posted online at www.ossipeelake.org/report. A brief history of the Natural Area may also be found online at the Alliance website, www.ossipeelake.org.

Additional Note

The N.H. Natural Heritage Bureau has updated its list of rare and endangered plants, per the Native Plant Protection Act. Find out more at <http://nh.gov/dred/divisions/forestand-lands/bureaus/naturalheritage/>.

"Of the five natural communities found in the proposed beach area, four are rare in New Hampshire and one is not known to exist elsewhere in the state."

WANT TO SPEAK AT TOWN MEETING? GET TO KNOW THE RULES

OSSIPEE — For the communities of Ossipee Lake, the annual Town Meeting in March is the political event of the year.

Budgets are approved or voted down, decisions are made on environmental and zoning issues, and everyone has a chance to stand up and be heard – even non-resident property owners.

While non-residents can't vote at Town Meetings, they do have a voice, thanks to protocols developed and administered by the area's town moderators. To speak up, however, you need to know the rules.

We contacted Ossipee and Freedom, and for good measure we also asked Madison, Tamworth and Effingham how non-resident property owners in their towns can mount the Town Meeting soap box.

Town of Ossipee

Ossipee has a written policy stating only residents can speak, but moderator Don Meader always asks if non-residents are present and wish to be heard on a particular topic.

If there are no objections, the speaker is in. If an objection is heard, the room votes the speaker up or down.

Town Administrator Martha Eldridge says non-residents are usually accommodated, but showing up on time is important since the decision on having non-residents speak is made at the start of the meeting.

Town of Freedom

Don Johnson, Freedom's town moderator, says his general policy is that anyone can speak, although he prefers that non-residents let him know their interest before the meeting starts.

A show of hands tells him how many non-residents are present and where they are in the room. Resident-voters are always permitted to speak first, after which non-residents are invited to weigh-in.

"It's a small town," Johnson says. "I have no problem letting anyone who has come to the meeting have an opportunity to talk."

Getting the Green Light

It's easy to spot the non-residents at Effingham's Town Meeting. That's because they're asked to sit in the back of the room so the moderator knows who's who when it comes time for a vote.

The moderator determines whether or not non-residents can be heard, but officials say the green light is almost always given.

That goes for Madison as well, where George

Epstein says his rule is that non-residents have the right to speak by default. If anyone in the room objects to a particular speaker, he has to speak up and ask for a vote.

While it's rare that such a vote is taken, Epstein recalls it happening once after a speaker repeatedly and aggressively sought the floor.

If decorum helps, Tamworth's George Cleveland says that brevity is important as well.

"That goes for residents and non-residents alike," he adds.

Cleveland has held sway over his town's podium for 27 years and says he has never denied a speaker during his watch.

In fact, he thinks more people should attend Town Meeting, whether or not they want to speak.

"You should experience this unique form of local government while it's still around," he says.

Cleveland plans to step down after this year's meeting, ending a run he says has encompassed more than half his life.

"Next year I'll get to experience the meeting from a new vantage point as a member of the audience," he says.

"After all these years it's time to let someone else take over."

MCDONALD NAMED TO ALLIANCE BOARD

FREEDOM — Ossipee Lake Alliance has announced the appointment of Robert McDonald to its board of directors, effective immediately.

McDonald is a member of the senior management team of the Lotus division of IBM's Software Group.

He and his wife, Mary Ellen, and their three children divide their time between Lynnfield, Massachusetts and Long Sands.

In his spare time, McDonald enjoys coaching soccer and baseball and says that as a relative newcomer to the lake he's still working on his boating skills.

In making the announcement, Alliance executive director David Smith said:

"Bob McDonald understands the importance of building community support for preserving the lake's beauty and natural resources while advancing recreational opportunities."

"All of us at the Alliance look forward to working with him in the coming year."

WIND, RAIN AND FLOODS, FOLLOWED BY EARLY WINTER ICE

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Nowhere To Go

The gist of the problem was that the rainwater had nowhere to go but to the dam. While high water often recedes rapidly in the spring as rain seeps into the ground and is absorbed by trees and vegetation, the absorption effect is lost during the fall. Add short days and cold nights to the mix, and late season high water takes longer to recede.

After an early November lull in the rain, another four inches fell on Thanksgiving to put the lake at 407.25' – the same level as almost three months earlier. At that point, the lake community's thoughts turned to snow and ice.

Hard Freeze

The lake can freeze at any time between November and early January. While it's preferable that the water be at its lowest level, it is not necessarily a problem if it isn't because the lake will continue to drain at the dam.

The ice is another matter, however. If it freezes close to the shoreline it will stay there for the duration. In spring, a combination of snow melt and heavy rain can cause the water to rise

and take the ice with it. Warming temperatures break the ice into large sheets and the wind can push the sheets onto the shore to damage buildings and tear away trees and chunks of vegetation.

Whether that will happen this year is up to Mother Nature, but the stage for such an event was set when the lake froze at 405.4' on December 17th.

New State Policy

As for now, Representative Babson is thinking about how future drawdowns should be planned. He wants to hold a spring meeting of state and local officials as well as members of the lake community to discuss how to balance competing needs and priorities.

"It's everybody's water," he told the Conway Daily Sun. "If they're going to drain the lake for five people maybe we ought to find a better way to do this."

By summer, talk of 2005's drawdown and wild weather will likely fade as the lake community reacts to a new state policy that will keep the water at its full summer level through Columbus Day weekend to accommodate boaters. That policy takes effect this year.

HIGH TAXES ON THE LAKE

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for forcing older citizens off increasingly valuable family homesteads and farms. Property taxes fund the bulk of local services, including schools.

Area officials have said the system was developed when the value of land was linked to its ability to produce profit, often in the form of crops. With the demise of small family farms, and the boom in residential development, some values, particularly of land with mountain views and waterfront, have spiraled to unseen heights. And taxes went with them.

While some of Ossipee's older residents, who are hoping to hang onto their lakefront lots, struggle with spiking taxes, Eisener said other locals have seen tax reductions.

As these taxes go down, he said, the added cost of the beach will look less imposing on their tax bills. Meanwhile, people like Eisener will keep paying more and more, he said, to make up the difference.

"If you want to buy a television that costs \$4,000, you might not. But if somebody is going to give you \$2,500, you might," he said.

"Outsiders pay 60 percent, so others whose

taxes go down can afford to buy a beach."

Town Hall said it is nearly impossible to confirm Eisener's claim that non-locals pay 60 percent. The 28 homes on Long Sands Road, valued at roughly \$23 million, represent 3 percent of the town's tax base, according to a town hall study.

Properties on Ossipee Lake overall, the largest of the town's many water bodies, last year made up 27 percent of the base, the study said. Staff said Thursday they are increasing the scope of the study, for which results should be available in several days.

Eisener said this year is the worst ever on Long Sands Road, and people are at their breaking point. "This is just beyond beyond," he said. "We can't take another hit."

He said if selectmen can't help lower assessments, the association may petition the state. Eisener's half acre, with 100 feet of lake frontage, which is now worth \$666,000, in 1958 cost him \$2,500. "And that is just the land, not the building," Hansen said.

Both Mellow and Hansen said they expect Ossipee lake homes will soon sell for no less than \$1 million.

"Four out of the five homes that sold in this latest rash of turnovers went at prices below the assessed values assigned by the town this year."



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OSSIPEE LAKE REPORT - WINTER 2006



INSIDE:

- Wild Autumn Weather, Early Ice
- High Taxes On the Lake
- Know the Rules for Town Meeting
- McDonald Named to Board
- Long Sands Study Released

Preserve. Protect. Educate.

